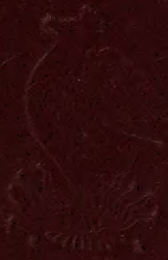

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THREE SISTERS

AND OTHER PLAYS

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THREE SISTERS

AND OTHER PLAYS

By

ANTON TCHEHOV

From the Russian by
CONSTANCE GARNETT

CHATTO AND WINDUS
LONDON

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
THREE SISTERS	1
IVANOV	97
A SWAN-SONG	193
AN UNWILLING MARTYR	207
THE ANNIVERSARY	219
ON THE HIGH ROAD	243
THE WEDDING	277

THREE SISTERS

First performed in 1901

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

ANDREY SERGEYEVITCH PROZOROV.

NATALYA IVANOVNA, *also called* NATASHA (*his fiancée, afterwards his wife*).

OLGA
MASHA } (*his sisters*).
IRINA

FYODOR ILYITCH KULIGIN (*a High-school Teacher, husband of Masha*).

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL ALEXANDR IGNATYEVITCH VERSHININ (*Battery-Commander*).

BARON NIKOLAY LVOVITCH TUSENBACH (*Lieutenant*).

VASSILY VASSILYEVITCH SOLYONY (*Captain*).

IVAN ROMANITCH TCHEBUTYKIN (*Army Doctor*).

ALEXEY PETROVITCH FEDOTIK (*Second Lieutenant*).

VLADIMIR KARLOVITCH RODDEY (*Second Lieutenant*).

FERAPONT (*an old Porter from the Rural Board*).

ANFISA (*the Nurse, an old woman of eighty*).

The action takes place in a provincial town.

ACT I

In the house of the PROZOROVS. *A drawing-room with columns beyond which a large room is visible. Mid-day; it is bright and sunny. The table in the further room is being laid for lunch.*

OLGA, *in the dark blue uniform of a high-school teacher, is correcting exercise books, at times standing still and then walking up and down;* MASHA, *in a black dress, with her hat on her knee, is reading a book;* IRINA, *in a white dress, is standing plunged in thought.*

OLGA. Father died just a year ago, on this very day—the fifth of May, your name-day, Irina. It was very cold, snow was falling. I felt as though I should not live through it; you lay fainting as though you were dead. But now a year has passed and we can think of it calmly; you are already in a white dress, your face is radiant. (*The clock strikes twelve.*) The clock was striking then too (*a pause*). I remember the band playing and the firing at the cemetery as they carried the coffin. Though he was a general in command of a brigade, yet there weren't many people there. It was raining, though. Heavy rain and snow.

IRINA. Why recall it!

(BARON TUSENBACH, TCHEBUTYKIN *and* SOLYONY *appear near the table in the dining-room, beyond the columns.*)

OLGA. It is warm to-day, we can have the windows open, but the birches are not in leaf yet. Father was given his brigade and came here with us from Moscow eleven years ago and I remember distinctly that in Moscow at this time, at the beginning of May, everything was already in flower; it was warm, and everything was bathed in sunshine. It's eleven years ago, and yet I remember it all as though we had left it yesterday. Oh, dear! I woke up this morning, I saw a blaze of sunshine. I saw the spring, and joy stirred in my heart. I had a passionate longing to be back at home again!

TCHEBUTYKIN. The devil it is!

TUSENBACH. Of course, it's nonsense.

(MASHA, *brooding over a book, softly whistles a song.*)

OLGA. Don't whistle, Masha. How can you! (*a pause*). Being all day in school and then at my lessons till the evening gives me a perpetual headache and thoughts as gloomy as though I were old. And really these four years that I have been at the high-school I have felt my strength and my youth oozing away from me every day. And only one yearning grows stronger and stronger. . . .

IRINA. To go back to Moscow. To sell the house, to make an end of everything here, and off to Moscow. . . .

OLGA. Yes! To Moscow, and quickly.

(TCHEBUTYKIN *and* TUSENBACH *laugh.*)

IRINA. Andrey will probably be a professor, he will not live here anyhow. The only difficulty is poor Masha.

OLGA. Masha will come and spend the whole summer in Moscow every year.

(MASHA *softly whistles a tune.*)

IRINA. Please God it will all be managed. (*Looking out of window*) How fine it is to-day. I don't know why I feel so light-hearted! I remembered this morning that it was my name-day and at once I felt joyful and thought of my childhood when mother was living. And I was thrilled by such wonderful thoughts, such thoughts!

OLGA. You are radiant to-day and looking lovelier than usual. And Masha is lovely too. Andrey would be nice-looking, but he has grown too fat and that does not suit him. And I have grown older and ever so much thinner. I suppose it's because I get so cross with the girls at school. To-day now I am free, I am at home, and my head doesn't ache, and I feel younger than yesterday. I am only twenty-eight. . . . It's all quite right, it's all from God, but it seems to me that if I were married and sitting at home all day, it would be better (*a pause*). I should be fond of my husband.

TUSENBACH (*to* SOLYONY). You talk such nonsense, I am tired of listening to you. (*Coming into the drawing-room*) I forgot to tell you, you will receive a visit to-day from Vershinin, the

new commander of our battery (*sits down to the piano*).

OLGA. Well, I shall be delighted.

IRINA. Is he old?

TUSENBACH. No, nothing to speak of. Forty or forty-five at the most (*softly plays the piano*). He seems to be a nice fellow. He is not stupid, that's certain. Only he talks a lot.

IRINA. Is he interesting?

TUSENBACH. Yes, he is all right, only he has a wife, a mother-in-law and two little girls. And it's his second wife too. He is paying calls and telling everyone that he has a wife and two little girls. He'll tell you so too. His wife seems a bit crazy, with her hair in a long plait like a girl's, always talks in a high-flown style, makes philosophical reflections and frequently attempts to commit suicide, evidently to annoy her husband. I should have left a woman like that years ago, but he puts up with her and merely complains.

SOLYONY (*coming into the drawing-room with* TCHEBUTYKIN). With one hand I can only lift up half a hundredweight, but with both hands I can lift up a hundredweight and a half or even a hundredweight and three-quarters. From that I conclude that two men are not only twice but three times as strong as one man, or even more. . . .

TCHEBUTYKIN (*reading the newspaper as he comes in*). For hair falling out . . . two ounces of naphthaline in half a bottle of spirit . . . to be dissolved and used daily . . . (*puts it down in his notebook*). Let's make a note of it! No,

I don't want it . . . (*scratches it out*). It doesn't matter.

IRINA. Ivan Romanitch, dear Ivan Romanitch!

TCHEBUTYKIN. What is it, my child, my joy?

IRINA. Tell me, why is it I am so happy to-day? As though I were sailing with the great blue sky above me and big white birds flying over it. Why is it? Why?

TCHEBUTYKIN (*kissing both her hands, tenderly*). My white bird. . . .

IRINA. When I woke up this morning, got up and washed, it suddenly seemed to me as though everything in the world was clear to me and that I knew how one ought to live. Dear Ivan Romanitch, I know all about it. A man ought to work, to toil in the sweat of his brow, whoever he may be, and all the purpose and meaning of his life, his happiness, his ecstasies lie in that alone. How delightful to be a workman who gets up before dawn and breaks stones on the road, or a shepherd, or a schoolmaster teaching children, or an engine-driver. . . . Oh, dear! to say nothing of human beings, it would be better to be an ox, better to be a humble horse and work, than a young woman who wakes at twelve o'clock, then has coffee in bed, then spends two hours dressing. . . . Oh, how awful that is! Just as one has a craving for water in hot weather I have a craving for work. And if I don't get up early and work, give me up as a friend, Ivan Romanitch.

TCHEBUTYKIN (*tenderly*). I'll give you up, I'll give you up. . . .

OLGA. Father trained us to get up at seven o'clock. Now Irina wakes at seven and lies in bed at least till nine thinking. And she looks so serious! (*laughs*).

IRINA. You are used to thinking of me as a child and are surprised when I look serious. I am twenty!

TUSENBACH. The yearning for work, oh dear, how well I understand it! I have never worked in my life. I was born in cold, idle Petersburg, in a family that had known nothing of work or cares of any kind. I remember, when I came home from the school of cadets, a footman used to pull off my boots. I used to be troublesome, but my mother looked at me with reverential awe, and was surprised when other people did not do the same. I was guarded from work. But I doubt if they have succeeded in guarding me completely, I doubt it! The time is at hand, an avalanche is moving down upon us, a mighty clearing storm which is coming, is already near and will soon blow the laziness, the indifference, the distaste for work, the rotten boredom out of our society. I shall work, and in another twenty-five or thirty years every one will have to work. Every one!

TCHEBUTYKIN. I am not going to work.

TUSENBACH. You don't count.

SOLYONY. In another twenty-five years you won't be here, thank God. In two or three years you will kick the bucket, or I shall lose my temper and put a bullet through your head, my angel (*pulls a scent-bottle out of his pocket and sprinkles his chest and hands*).

TCHEBUTYKIN (*laughs*). And I really have never done anything at all. I haven't done a stroke of work since I left the university, I have never read a book, I read nothing but newspapers . . . (*takes another newspaper out of his pocket*). Here . . . I know, for instance, from the newspapers that there was such a person as Dobrolyubov, but what he wrote, I can't say. . . . Goodness only knows. . . . (*A knock is heard on the floor from the storey below.*) There . . . they are calling me downstairs, someone has come for me. I'll be back directly. . . . Wait a minute . . . (*goes out hurriedly, combing his beard*).

IRINA. He's got something up his sleeve.

TUSENBACH. Yes, he went out with a solemn face, evidently he is just going to bring you a present.

IRINA. What a nuisance!

OLGA. Yes, it's awful. He is always doing something silly.

MASHA. By the sea-strand an oak-tree green . . . upon that oak a chain of gold . . . upon that oak a chain of gold (*gets up, humming softly*).

OLGA. You are not very cheerful to-day, Masha.

(MASHA, *humming, puts on her hat.*)

OLGA. Where are you going?

MASHA. Home.

IRINA. How queer! . . .

TUSENBACH. To go away from a name-day party!

MASHA. Never mind. . . . I'll come in the evening. Good-bye, my darling . . . (*kisses* IRINA). Once again I wish you, be well and happy. In old days, when father was alive, we

always had thirty or forty officers here on name-days; it was noisy, but to-day there is only a man and a half, and it is as still as the desert. . . . I'll go. . . . I am in the blues to-day, I am feeling glum, so don't you mind what I say (*laughing through her tears*). We'll talk some other time, and so for now good-bye, darling, I am going. . . .

IRINA (*discontentedly*). Oh, how tiresome you are. . . .

OLGA (*with tears*). I understand you, Masha.

SOLYONY. If a man philosophises, there will be philosophy or sophistry, anyway, but if a woman philosophises, or two do it, then you may just snap your fingers!

MASHA. What do you mean to say by that, you terrible person?

SOLYONY. Nothing. He had not time to say "alack," before the bear was on his back (*a pause*).

MASHA (*to* OLGA, *angrily*). Don't blubber!

(*Enter* ANFISA *and* FERAPONT *carrying a cake.*)

ANFISA. This way, my good man. Come in, your boots are clean. (*To* IRINA) From the Rural Board, from Mihail Ivanitch Protopopov. . . . A cake.

IRINA. Thanks. Thank him (*takes the cake*).

FERAPONT. What?

IRINA (*more loudly*). Thank him from me!

OLGA. Nurse dear, give him some pie. Ferapont, go along, they will give you some pie.

FERAPONT. Eh?

ANFISA. Come along, Ferapont Spiridonitch, my good soul, come along . . . (*goes out with* FERAPONT).

MASHA. I don't like that Protopopov, that Mihail Potapitch or Ivanitch. He ought not to be invited.

IRINA. I did not invite him.

MASHA. That's a good thing.

(*Enter* TCHEBUTYKIN, *followed by an orderly with a silver samovar; a hum of surprise and displeasure*).

OLGA (*putting her hands over her face*). A samovar! How awful! (*goes out to the table in the dining-room*).

IRINA. My dear Ivan Romanitch, what are you thinking about!

TUSENBACH (*laughs*). I warned you!

MASHA. Ivan Romanitch, you really have no conscience!

TCHEBUTYKIN. My dear girls, my darlings, you are all that I have, you are the most precious treasures I have on earth. I shall soon be sixty, I am an old man, alone in the world, a useless old man. . . . There is nothing good in me, except my love for you, and if it were not for you, I should have been dead long ago. . . . (*To* IRINA) My dear, my little girl, I've known you from a baby . . . I've carried you in my arms. . . . I loved your dear mother. . . .

IRINA. But why such expensive presents?

TCHEBUTYKIN (*angry and tearful*). Expensive presents. . . . Get along with you! (*To the orderly*) Take the samovar in there . . . (*mimicking*) Expensive presents . . . (*The orderly carries the samovar into the dining-room*).

ANFISA (*crossing the room*). My dears, a colonel is here, a stranger. . . . He has taken off his

greatcoat, children, he is coming in here. Irinushka, you must be nice and polite, dear . . . (*as she goes out*). And it's time for lunch already . . . mercy on us. . . .

TUSENBACH. Vershinin, I suppose.

(*Enter* VERSHININ.)

TUSENBACH. Colonel Vershinin.

VERSHININ (*to* MASHA *and* IRINA). I have the honour to introduce myself, my name is Vershinin. I am very, very glad to be in your house at last. How you have grown up! Aie-aie!

IRINA. Please sit down. We are delighted to see you.

VERSHININ (*with animation*). How glad I am, how glad I am! But there are three of you sisters. I remember—three little girls. I don't remember your faces, but that your father, Colonel Prozorov, had three little girls I remember perfectly, and saw them with my own eyes. How time passes! Hey-ho, how it passes!

TUSENBACH. Alexandr Ignatyevitch has come from Moscow.

IRINA. From Moscow? You have come from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes. Your father was in command of a battery there, and I was an officer in the same brigade. (*To* MASHA). Your face, now, I seem to remember.

MASHA. I don't remember you.

IRINA. Olya! Olya! (*calls into the dining-room*) Olya, come!

(OLGA *comes out of the dining-room into the drawing-room.*)

IRINA. Colonel Vershinin is from Moscow, it appears.

VERSHININ. So you are Olga Sergeyevna, the eldest. . . . And you are Marya. . . . And you are Irina, the youngest. . . .

OLGA. You come from Moscow ?

VERSHININ. Yes. I studied in Moscow. I began my service there, I served there for years, and at last I have been given a battery here—I have come here as you see. I don't remember you exactly, I only remember you were three sisters. I remember your father. If I shut my eyes, I can see him as though he were living. I used to visit you in Moscow. . . .

OLGA. I thought I remembered everyone, and now all at once . . .

VERSHININ. My name is Alexandr Ignatyevitch.

IRINA. Alexandr Ignatyevitch, you have come from Moscow. . . . What a surprise !

OLGA. We are going to move there, you know.

IRINA. We are hoping to be there by the autumn. It's our native town, we were born there. . . . In Old Basmanny Street . . . (*both laugh with delight*).

MASHA. To see some one from our own town unexpectedly ! (*Eagerly*) Now I remember ! Do you remember, Olya, they used to talk of the "love-sick major" ? You were a lieutenant at that time and were in love, and for some reason everyone called you "major" to tease you. . . .

VERSHININ (*laughs*). Yes, yes. . . . The love-sick major, that was it.

MASHA. You only had a moustache then. . . . Oh, how much older you look! (*through tears*) how much older!

VERSHININ. Yes, when I was called the love-sick major I was young, I was in love. Now it's very different.

OLGA. But you haven't a single grey hair. You have grown older but you are not old.

VERSHININ. I am in my forty-third year, though. Is it long since you left Moscow?

IRINA. Eleven years. But why are you crying, Masha, you queer girl? . . . (*through her tears*) I shall cry too. . . .

MASHA. I am all right. And in which street did you live?

VERSHININ. In Old Basmanny.

OLGA. And that's where we lived too. . . .

VERSHININ. At one time I lived in Nyemetsky Street. I used to go from there to the Red Barracks. There is a gloomy-looking bridge on the way, where the water makes a noise. It makes a lonely man feel melancholy (*a pause*). And here what a broad, splendid river! A marvellous river!

OLGA. Yes, but it is cold. It's cold here and there are gnats. . . .

VERSHININ. How can you! You've such a splendid healthy Russian climate here. Forest, river . . . and birches here too. Charming, modest birches, I love them better than any other trees. It's nice to live here. The only strange thing is that the railway station is fifteen miles away. . . . And no one knows why it is so.

SOLYONY. I know why it is (*They all look at him.*) Because if the station had been near it would not have been so far, and if it is far, it's because it is not near.

(*An awkward silence.*)

TUSENBACH. He is fond of his joke, Vassily Vassilyevitch.

OLGA. Now I recall you, too. I remember.

VERSHININ. I knew your mother.

TCHEBUTYKIN. She was a fine woman, the kingdom of heaven be hers.

IRINA. Mother is buried in Moscow.

OLGA. In the Novo-Dyevitchy. . . .

MASHA. Would you believe it, I am already beginning to forget her face. So people will not remember us either . . . they will forget us.

VERSHININ. Yes. They will forget us. Such is our fate, there is no help for it. What seems to us serious, significant, very important, will one day be forgotten or will seem unimportant (*a pause*). And it's curious that we can't possibly tell what exactly will be considered great and important, and what will seem paltry and ridiculous. Did not the discoveries of Copernicus or Columbus, let us say, seem useless and ridiculous at first, while the nonsensical writings of some wiseacre seemed true? And it may be that our present life, which we accept so readily, will in time seem queer, uncomfortable, not sensible, not clean enough, perhaps even sinful. . . .

TUSENBACH. Who knows? Perhaps our age will be called a great one and remembered with respect. Now we have no torture-chamber, no

executions, no invasions, but at the same time how much unhappiness there is!

SOLYONY (*in a high-pitched voice*). Chook, chook, chook. . . . It's bread and meat to the baron to talk about ideas.

TUSENBACH. Vassily Vassilyevitch, I ask you to let me alone . . . (*moves to another seat*). It gets boring, at last.

SOLYONY (*in a high-pitched voice*). Chook, chook, chook. . . .

TUSENBACH (*to* VERSHININ). The unhappiness which one observes now—there is so much of it—does indicate, however, that society has reached a certain moral level. . . .

VERSHININ. Yes, yes, of course.

TCHEBUTYKIN. You said just now, baron, that our age will be called great; but people are small all the same . . . (*gets up*). Look how small I am.

(*A violin is played behind the scenes.*)

MASHA. That's Andrey playing, our brother.

IRINA. He is the learned one of the family. We expect him to become a professor. Father was a military man, but his son has gone in for a learned career.

MASHA. It was father's wish.

OLGA. We have been teasing him to-day. We think he is a little in love.

IRINA. With a young lady living here. She will come in to-day most likely.

MASHA. Oh, how she dresses! It's not that her clothes are merely ugly or out of fashion, they are simply pitiful. A queer gaudy yellowish skirt with some sort of vulgar fringe and a red blouse.

And her cheeks scrubbed till they shine! Andrey is not in love with her—I won't admit that, he has some taste anyway—it's simply for fun, he is teasing us, playing the fool. I heard yesterday that she is going to be married to Protopopov, the chairman of our Rural Board. And a very good thing too. . . . (*At the side door*) Andrey, come here, dear, for a minute!

(*Enter* ANDREY.)

OLGA. This is my brother, Andrey Sergeyevitch.

VERSHININ. My name is Vershinin.

ANDREY. And mine is Prozorov (*mops his perspiring face*). You are our new battery commander?

OLGA. Only fancy, Alexandr Ignatyevitch comes from Moscow.

ANDREY. Really? Well, then, I congratulate you. My sisters will let you have no peace.

VERSHININ. I have had time to bore your sisters already.

IRINA. See what a pretty picture-frame Andrey has given me to-day! (*shows the frame*). He made it himself.

VERSHININ (*looking at the frame and not knowing what to say*). Yes . . . it is a thing. . . .

IRINA. And that frame above the piano, he made that too!

(ANDREY *waves his hand in despair and moves away.*)

OLGA. He is learned, and he plays the violin, and he makes all sorts of things with the fretsaw. In fact he is good all round. Andrey, don't go! That's a way he has—he always tries to make off! Come here!

(MASHA *and* IRINA *take him by the arms and, laughing, lead him back.*)

MASHA. Come, come!

ANDREY. Leave me alone, please!

MASHA. How absurd he is! Alexandr Ignatyevitch used to be called the love-sick major at one time, and he was not a bit offended.

VERSHININ. Not in the least!

MASHA. And I should like to call you the love-sick violinist!

IRINA. Or the love-sick professor!

OLGA. He is in love! Andryusha is in love!

IRINA (*claps her hands*). Bravo, bravo! Encore! Andryusha is in love!

TCHEBUTYKIN (*comes up behind* ANDREY *and puts both arms round his waist*). Nature our hearts for love created! (*laughs, then sits down and reads the newspaper which he takes out of his pocket*).

ANDREY. Come, that's enough, that's enough . . . (*mops his face*). I haven't slept all night and this morning I don't feel quite myself, as they say. I read till four o'clock and then went to bed, but it was no use. I thought of one thing and another, and then it gets light so early; the sun simply pours into my bedroom. I want while I am here during the summer to translate a book from the English. . . .

VERSHININ. You read English then?

ANDREY. Yes. Our father, the kingdom of heaven be his, oppressed us with education. It's absurd and silly, but it must be confessed I began to get fatter after his death, and I have grown too fat in one year, as though a weight had been taken

off my body. Thanks to our father we all know English, French and German, and Irina knows Italian too. But what it cost us!

MASHA. In this town to know three languages is an unnecessary luxury! Not even a luxury, but an unnecessary encumbrance, like a sixth finger. We know a great deal that is unnecessary.

VERSHININ. What next! (*laughs.*) You know a great deal that is unnecessary! I don't think there can be a town so dull and dismal that intelligent and educated people are unnecessary in it. Let us suppose that of the hundred thousand people living in this town, which is, of course, uncultured and behind the times, there are only three of your sort. It goes without saying that you cannot conquer the mass of darkness round you; little by little, as you go on living, you will be lost in the crowd. You will have to give in to it. Life will get the better of you, but still you will not disappear without a trace. After you there may appear perhaps six like you, then twelve and so on until such as you form a majority. In two or three hundred years life on earth will be unimaginably beautiful, marvellous. Man needs such a life and, though he hasn't it yet, he must have a presentiment of it, expect it, dream of it, prepare for it; for that he must see and know more than his father and grandfather (*laughs*). And you complain of knowing a great deal that's unnecessary.

MASHA (*takes off her hat*). I'll stay to lunch.

IRINA (*with a sigh*). All that really ought to be written down. . . .

(ANDREY *has slipped away unobserved.*)

TUSENBACH. You say that after many years life on earth will be beautiful and marvellous. That's true. But in order to have any share, however far off, in it now one must be preparing for it, one must be working. . . .

VERSHININ (*gets up*). Yes. What a lot of flowers you have! (*looking round*). And delightful rooms. I envy you! I've been knocking about all my life from one wretched lodging to another, always with two chairs and a sofa and stoves which smoke. What I have been lacking all my life is just such flowers . . . (*rubs his hands*). But there, it's no use thinking about it!

TUSENBACH. Yes, we must work. I'll be bound you think the German is getting sentimental. But on my honour I am Russian and I can't even speak German. My father belonged to the Orthodox Church . . . (*a pause*).

VERSHININ (*walks about the stage*). I often think, what if one were to begin life over again, knowing what one is about! If one life, which has been already lived, were only a rough sketch so to say, and the second were the fair copy! Then, I fancy, every one of us would try before everything not to repeat himself, anyway he would create a different setting for his life; would have a house like this with plenty of light and masses of flowers. . . . I have a wife and two little girls, my wife is in delicate health and so on and so on, but if I were to begin life over again I would not marry. . . . No, no!

(*Enter* KULIGIN *in the uniform of a schoolmaster.*)

KULIGIN (*goes up to* IRINA). Dear sister, allow me to congratulate you on your name-day and with all my heart to wish you good health and everything else that one can desire for a girl of your age. And to offer you as a gift this little book (*gives her a book*). The history of our high-school for fifty years, written by myself. An insignificant little book, written because I had nothing better to do, but still you can read it. Good morning, friends. (*To* VERSHININ) My name is Kuligin, teacher in the high-school here. (*To* IRINA) In that book you will find a list of all who have finished their studies in our high-school during the last fifty years. *Feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes* (*kisses* MASHA).

IRINA. Why, but you gave me a copy of this book at Easter.

KULIGIN (*laughs*). Impossible! If that's so, give it me back, or better still, give it to the Colonel. Please accept it, Colonel. Some day when you are bored you can read it.

VERSHININ. Thank you (*is about to take leave*). I am extremely glad to have made your acquaintance. . . .

OLGA. You are going? No, no!

IRINA. You must stay to lunch with us. Please do.

OLGA. Pray do!

VERSHININ (*bows*). I believe I have chanced on a name-day. Forgive me, I did not know and have not congratulated you . . . (*walks away with* OLGA *into the dining-room*).

KULIGIN. To-day, gentlemen, is Sunday, a day

of rest. Let us all rest and enjoy ourselves each in accordance with our age and our position. The carpets should be taken up for the summer and put away till the winter. . . . Persian powder or naphthaline. . . . The Romans were healthy because they knew how to work and they knew how to rest, they had *mens sana in corpore sano*. Their life was moulded into a certain framework. Our headmaster says that the most important thing in every life is its framework. . . . What loses its framework, comes to an end—and it's the same in our everyday life. (*Puts his arm round* MASHA'S *waist, laughing.*) Masha loves me. My wife loves me. And the window curtains, too, ought to be put away together with the carpets. . . . To-day I feel cheerful and in the best of spirits. Masha, at four o'clock this afternoon we have to be at the headmaster's. An excursion has been arranged for the teachers and their families.

MASHA. I am not going.

KULIGIN (*grieved*). Dear Masha, why not?

MASHA. We'll talk about it afterwards . . . (*Angrily*) Very well, I will go, only let me alone, please . . . (*walks away*).

KULIGIN. And then we shall spend the evening at the headmaster's. In spite of the delicate state of his health, that man tries before all things to be sociable. He is an excellent, noble personality. A splendid man. Yesterday, after the meeting, he said to me, "I am tired, Fyodor Ilyitch, I am tired." (*Looks at the clock, then at his watch*) Your clock is seven minutes fast. "Yes," he said, "I am tired."

(*Sounds of a violin behind the scenes.*)

OLGA. Come to lunch, please. There's a pie!

KULIGIN. Ah, Olga, my dear Olga! Yesterday I was working from early morning till eleven o'clock at night and was tired out, and to-day I feel happy (*goes up to the table in the dining-room*). My dear. . . .

TCHEBUTYKIN (*puts the newspaper in his pocket and combs his beard*). Pie? Splendid!

MASHA (*to* TCHEBUTYKIN, *sternly*). Only mind you don't drink to-day! Do you hear? It's bad for you to drink.

TCHEBUTYKIN. Oh, come, that's a thing of the past. It's two years since I got drunk. (*Impatiently*) But there, my good girl, what does it matter!

MASHA. Anyway, don't you dare to drink. Don't dare. (*Angrily, but so as not to be heard by her husband*) Again, damnation take it, I am to be bored a whole evening at the headmaster's!

TUSENBACH. I wouldn't go if I were you. . . . It's very simple.

TCHEBUTYKIN. Don't go, my love.

MASHA. Oh, yes, don't go! . . . It's a damnable life, insufferable . . . (*goes to the dining-room*).

TCHEBUTYKIN (*following her*). Come, come. . . .

SOLYONY (*going to the dining-room*). Chook, chook, chook. . . .

TUSENBACH. Enough, Vassily Vassilyevitch! Leave off!

SOLYONY. Chook, chook, chook. . . .

KULIGIN (*gaily*). Your health, Colonel! I am a schoolmaster and one of the family here, Masha's

husband. . . . She is very kind really, very kind. . . .

VERSHININ. I'll have some of this dark-coloured vodka . . . (*drinks*). To your health! (*To* OLGA) I feel so happy with all of you!

(*No one is left in the drawing-room but* IRINA *and* TUSENBACH.)

IRINA. Masha is in low spirits to-day. She was married at eighteen, when she thought him the cleverest of men. But now it's not the same. He is the kindest of men, but he is not the cleverest.

OLGA (*impatiently*). Andrey, do come!

ANDREY (*behind the scenes*). I am coming (*comes in and goes to the table*).

TUSENBACH. What are you thinking about?

IRINA. Nothing. I don't like that Solyony of yours, I am afraid of him. He keeps on saying such stupid things. . . .

TUSENBACH. He is a queer man. I am sorry for him and annoyed by him, but more sorry. I think he is shy. . . . When one is alone with him he is very intelligent and friendly, but in company he is rude, a bully. Don't go yet, let them sit down to the table. Let me be by you. What are you thinking of? (*a pause*). You are twenty, I am not yet thirty. How many years have we got before us, a long, long chain of days full of my love for you. . . .

IRINA. Nikolay Lvovitch, don't talk to me about love.

TUSENBACH (*not listening*). I have a passionate craving for life, for struggle, for work, and that craving is mingled in my soul with my love for you,

Irina, and just because you are beautiful it seems to me that life too is beautiful! What are you thinking of?

IRINA. You say life is beautiful. . . . Yes, but what if it only seems so! Life for us three sisters has not been beautiful yet, we have been stifled by it as plants are choked by weeds. . . . I am shedding tears. . . . I mustn't do that (*hurriedly wipes her eyes and smiles*). I must work, I must work. The reason we are depressed and take such a gloomy view of life is that we know nothing of work. We come of people who despised work. . . .

(*Enter* NATALYA IVANOVNA; *she is wearing a pink dress with a green sash.*)

NATASHA. They are sitting down to lunch already. . . . I am late . . . (*Steals a glance at herself in the glass and sets herself to rights*) I think my hair is all right. (*Seeing* IRINA) Dear Irina Sergeyevna, I congratulate you! (*gives her a vigorous and prolonged kiss*). You have a lot of visitors, I really feel shy. . . . Good day, Baron!

OLGA (*coming into the drawing-room*). Well, here is Natalya Ivanovna! How are you, my dear? (*kisses her*).

NATASHA. Congratulations on the name-day. You have such a big party and I feel awfully shy. . . .

OLGA. Nonsense, we have only our own people. (*In an undertone, in alarm*) You've got on a green sash! My dear, that's not nice!

NATASHA. Why, is that a bad omen?

OLGA. No, it's only that it doesn't go with your dress . . . and it looks queer. . . .

NATASHA (*in a tearful voice*). Really? But you know it's not green exactly, it's more a dead colour (*follows* OLGA *into the dining-room*).

(*In the dining-room they are all sitting down to lunch; there is no one in the drawing-room.*)

KULIGIN. I wish you a good husband, Irina. It's time for you to think of getting married.

TCHEBUTYKIN. Natalya Ivanovna, I hope we may hear of your engagement, too.

KULIGIN. Natalya Ivanovna has got a suitor already.

MASHA (*strikes her plate with her fork*). Ladies and gentlemen, I want to make a speech!

KULIGIN. You deserve three bad marks for conduct.

VERSHININ. How nice this cordial is! What is it made of?

SOLYONY. Beetles.

IRINA (*in a tearful voice*). Ugh, ugh! How disgusting.

OLGA. We are going to have roast turkey and apple pie for supper. Thank God I am at home all day and shall be at home in the evening. . . . Friends, won't you come this evening?

VERSHININ. Allow me to come too.

IRINA. Please do.

NATASHA. They don't stand on ceremony.

TCHEBUTYKIN. Nature our hearts for love created! (*laughs*).

ANDREY (*angrily*). Do leave off, I wonder you are not tired of it!

(FEDOTIK *and* RODDEY *come in with a big basket of flowers.*)

FEDOTIK. I say, they are at lunch already.

RODDEY (*speaking loudly, with a lisp*). At lunch? Yes, they are at lunch already. . . .

FEDOTIK. Wait a minute (*takes a snapshot*). One! Wait another minute . . . (*takes another snapshot*). Two! Now it's ready. (*They take the basket and walk into the dining-room, where they are greeted noisily*).

RODDEY (*loudly*). My congratulations! I wish you everything, everything! The weather is delightful, perfectly magnificent. I've been out all the morning for a walk with the high-school boys. I teach them gymnastics.

FEDOTIK. You may move, Irina Sergeyevna, you may move (*taking a photograph*). You look charming to-day (*taking a top out of his pocket*). Here is a top, by the way. . . . It has a wonderful note. . . .

IRINA. How lovely!

MASHA. By the sea-shore an oak-tree green. . . . Upon that oak a chain of gold . . . (*Complainingly*) Why do I keep saying that? That phrase has been haunting me all day. . . .

KULIGIN. Thirteen at table!

RODDEY (*loudly*). Surely you do not attach importance to such superstitions? (*laughter*).

KULIGIN. If there are thirteen at table, it means that someone present is in love. It's not you, Ivan Romanovitch, by any chance? (*laughter*).

TCHEBUTYKIN. I am an old sinner, but why Natalya Ivanovna is overcome, I can't imagine . . .

(*Loud laughter*; NATASHA *runs out from the dining-room into the drawing-room, followed by* ANDREY.)

ANDREY. Come, don't take any notice! Wait a minute . . . stop, I entreat you. . . .

NATASHA. I am ashamed. . . . I don't know what's the matter with me and they make fun of me. I know it's improper for me to leave the table like this, but I can't help it. . . . I can't . . . (*covers her face with her hands*).

ANDREY. My dear girl, I entreat you, I implore you, don't be upset. I assure you they are only joking, they do it in all kindness. My dear, my sweet, they are all kind, warm-hearted people and they are fond of me and of you. Come here to the window, here they can't see us . . . (*looks round*).

NATASHA. I am so unaccustomed to society! . . .

ANDREY. Oh youth, lovely, marvellous youth! My dear, my sweet, don't be so distressed! Believe me, believe me. . . . I feel so happy, my soul is full of love and rapture. . . . Oh, they can't see us, they can't see us! Why, why I love you, when I first loved you—oh, I don't know. My dear, my sweet, pure one, be my wife! I love you, I love you . . . as I have never loved anyone . . . (*a kiss*).

(*Two officers come in and, seeing the pair kissing, stop in amazement.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II

The same scene as in the First Act. Eight o'clock in the evening. Behind the scenes in the street there is the faintly audible sound of a concertina. There is no light. NATALYA IVANOVNA *enters in a dressing-gown, carrying a candle; she comes in and stops at the door leading to* ANDREY'S *room.*

NATASHA. What are you doing, Andryusha? Reading? Never mind, I only just asked . . . (*goes and opens another door and, peeping into it, shuts it again*). Is there a light?

ANDREY (*enters with a book in his hand*). What is it, Natasha?

NATASHA. I was looking to see whether there was a light. . . . It's Carnival, the servants are not themselves; one has always to be on the look-out for fear something goes wrong. Last night at twelve o'clock I passed through the dining-room, and there was a candle left burning. I couldn't find out who had lighted it (*puts down the candle*). What's the time?

ANDREY (*looking at his watch*). A quarter past eight.

NATASHA. And Olga and Irina aren't in yet. They haven't come in. Still at work, poor

dears! Olga is at the teachers' council and Irina at the telegraph office . . . (*sighs*). I was saying to your sister this morning, "Take care of yourself, Irina darling," said I. But she won't listen. A quarter past eight, you say? I am afraid our Bobik is not at all well. Why is he so cold? Yesterday he was feverish and to-day he is cold all over. . . . I am so anxious!

ANDREY. It's all right, Natasha. The boy is quite well.

NATASHA. We had better be careful about his food, anyway. I am anxious. And I am told that the mummers are going to be here for the Carnival at nine o'clock this evening. It would be better for them not to come, Andryusha.

ANDREY. I really don't know. They've been invited, you know.

NATASHA. Baby woke up this morning, looked at me, and all at once he gave a smile; so he knew me. "Good morning, Bobik!" said I. "Good morning, darling!" And he laughed. Children understand; they understand very well. So I shall tell them, Andryusha, not to let the carnival party come in.

ANDREY (*irresolutely*). That's for my sisters to say. It's for them to give orders.

NATASHA. Yes, for them too; I will speak to them. They are so kind . . . (*is going*). I've ordered junket for supper. The doctor says you must eat nothing but junket, or you will never get thinner (*stops*). Bobik is cold. I am afraid his room is chilly, perhaps. We ought to put him in a different room till the warm weather comes,

anyway. Irina's room, for instance, is just right for a nursery: it's dry and the sun shines there all day. I must tell her; she might share Olga's room for the time. . . . She is never at home, anyway, except for the night . . . (*a pause*). Andryushantchik, why don't you speak?

ANDREY. Nothing. I was thinking. . . . Besides, I have nothing to say.

NATASHA. Yes . . . what was it I meant to tell you? . . . Oh, yes; Ferapont has come from the Rural Board, and is asking for you.

ANDREY (*yawns*). Send him in.

(NATASHA *goes out;* ANDREY, *bending down to the candle which she has left behind, reads. Enter* FERAPONT; *he wears an old shabby overcoat, with the collar turned up, and has a scarf over his ears.*)

ANDREY. Good evening, my good man. What is it?

FERAPONT. The Chairman has sent a book and a paper of some sort here . . . (*gives the book and an envelope*).

ANDREY. Thanks. Very good. But why have you come so late? It is past eight.

FERAPONT. Eh?

ANDREY (*louder*). I say, you have come late. It is eight o'clock.

FERAPONT. Just so. I came before it was dark, but they wouldn't let me see you. The master is busy, they told me. Well, of course, if you are busy, I am in no hurry (*thinking that* ANDREY *has asked him a question*). Eh?

ANDREY. Nothing (*examines the book*). To-

morrow is Friday. We haven't a sitting, but I'll come all the same . . . and do my work. It's dull at home . . . (*a pause*). Dear old man, how strangely life changes and deceives one! To-day I was so bored and had nothing to do, so I picked up this book—old university lectures—and I laughed. . . . Good heavens! I am the secretary of the Rural Board of which Protopopov is the chairman. I am the secretary, and the most I can hope for is to become a member of the Board! Me, a member of the local Rural Board, while I dream every night I am professor of the University of Moscow—a distinguished man, of whom all Russia is proud!

FERAPONT. I can't say, sir. . . . I don't hear well. . . .

ANDREY. If you did hear well, perhaps I should not talk to you. I must talk to somebody, and my wife does not understand me. My sisters I am somehow afraid of—I'm afraid they will laugh at me and make me ashamed. . . . I don't drink, I am not fond of restaurants, but how I should enjoy sitting at Tyestov's in Moscow at this moment, dear old chap!

FERAPONT. A contractor was saying at the Board the other day that there were some merchants in Moscow eating pancakes; one who ate forty, it seems, died. It was either forty or fifty, I don't remember.

ANDREY. In Moscow you sit in a huge room at a restaurant; you know no one and no one knows you, and at the same time you don't feel a stranger. . . . But here you know everyone and everyone

knows you, and yet you are a stranger—a stranger. . . . A stranger, and lonely. . . .

FERAPONT. Eh? (*a pause*). And the same contractor says—maybe it's not true—that there's a rope stretched right across Moscow.

ANDREY. What for?

FERAPONT. I can't say, sir. The contractor said so.

ANDREY. Nonsense (*reads*). Have you ever been in Moscow?

FERAPONT (*after a pause*). No, never. It was not God's will I should (*a pause*). Am I to go?

ANDREY. You can go. Good-bye. (FERAPONT *goes out.*) Good-bye (*reading*). Come to-morrow morning and take some papers here. . . . Go. . . . (*a pause*). He has gone (*a ring*). Yes, it is a business . . . (*stretches and goes slowly into his own room*).

(*Behind the scenes a Nurse is singing, rocking a baby to sleep. Enter* MASHA *and* VERSHININ. *While they are talking a maidservant is lighting a lamp and candles in the dining-room.*)

MASHA. I don't know (*a pause*). I don't know. Of course habit does a great deal. After father's death, for instance, it was a long time before we could get used to having no orderlies in the house. But apart from habit, I think it's a feeling of justice makes me say so. Perhaps it is not so in other places, but in our town the most decent, honourable, and well-bred people are all in the army.

VERSHININ. I am thirsty. I should like some tea.

MASHA (*glancing at the clock*). They will soon be bringing it. I was married when I was eighteen, and I was afraid of my husband because he was a teacher, and I had only just left school. In those days I thought him an awfully learned, clever, and important person. And now it is not the same, unfortunately. . . .

VERSHININ. Yes. . . . I see. . . .

MASHA. I am not speaking of my husband—I am used to him; but among civilians generally there are so many rude, ill-mannered, badly-brought-up people. Rudeness upsets and distresses me: I am unhappy when I see that a man is not refined, not gentle, not polite enough. When I have to be among the teachers, my husband's colleagues, it makes me quite miserable.

VERSHININ. Yes. . . . But, to my mind, it makes no difference whether they are civilians or military men—they are equally uninteresting, in this town anyway. It's all the same! If one listens to a man of the educated class here, civilian or military, he is worried to death by his wife, worried to death by his house, worried to death by his estate, worried to death by his horses. . . . A Russian is peculiarly given to exalted ideas, but why is it he always falls so short in life? Why?

MASHA. Why?

VERSHININ. Why is he worried to death by his children and by his wife? And why are his wife and children worried to death by him?

MASHA. You are rather depressed this evening.

VERSHININ. Perhaps. . . . I've had no dinner to-day, and had nothing to eat since the morning.

My daughter is not quite well, and when my little girls are ill I am consumed by anxiety; my conscience reproaches me for having given them such a mother. Oh, if you had seen her to-day! She is a wretched creature! We began quarrelling at seven o'clock in the morning, and at nine I slammed the door and went away (*a pause*). I never talk about it. Strange, it's only to you I complain (*kisses her hand*). Don't be angry with me. . . . Except for you I have no one—no one . . . (*a pause*).

MASHA. What a noise in the stove! Before father died there was howling in the chimney. There, just like that.

VERSHININ. Are you superstitious?

MASHA. Yes.

VERSHININ. That's strange (*kisses her hand*). You are a splendid, wonderful woman. Splendid! Wonderful! It's dark, but I see the light in your eyes.

MASHA (*moves to another chair*). It's lighter here.

VERSHININ. I love you—love, love. . . . I love your eyes, your movements, I see them in my dreams. . . . Splendid, wonderful woman!

MASHA (*laughing softly*). When you talk to me like that, for some reason I laugh, though I am frightened. . . . Please don't do it again . . . (*In an undertone*) You may say it, though; I don't mind . . . (*covers her face with her hands*). I don't mind. . . . Someone is coming. Talk of something else.

(IRINA *and* TUSENBACH *come in through the dining-room.*)

TUSENBACH. I've got a three-barrelled name. My name is Baron Tusenbach-Kronc-Altschauer, but I belong to the Orthodox Church and am just as Russian as you. There is very little of the German left in me—nothing, perhaps, but the patience and perseverance with which I bore you. I see you home every evening.

IRINA. How tired I am!

TUSENBACH. And every day I will come to the telegraph office and see you home. I'll do it for ten years, for twenty years, till you drive me away . . . (*Seeing* MASHA *and* VERSHININ, *delightedly*) Oh, it's you! How are you?

IRINA. Well, I am home at last. (*To* MASHA) A lady came just now to telegraph to her brother in Saratov that her son died to-day, and she could not think of the address. So she sent it without an address—simply to Saratov. She was crying. And I was rude to her for no sort of reason. Told her I had no time to waste. It was so stupid. Are the Carnival people coming to-night?

MASHA. Yes.

IRINA (*sits down in an arm-chair*). I must rest. I am tired.

TUSENBACH (*with a smile*). When you come from the office you seem so young, so forlorn . . . (*a pause*).

IRINA. I am tired. No, I don't like telegraph work, I don't like it.

MASHA. You've grown thinner . . . (*whistles*). And you look younger, rather like a boy in the face.

TUSENBACH. That's the way she does her hair.

IRINA. I must find some other job, this does not suit me. What I so longed for, what I dreamed of is the very thing that it's lacking in. . . . It is work without poetry, without meaning. . . . (*a knock on the floor*). There's the doctor knocking. . . . (*To* TUSENBACH) Do knock, dear. . . . I can't. . . . I am tired.

(TUSENBACH *knocks on the floor.*)

IRINA. He will come directly. We ought to do something about it. The doctor and our Andrey were at the Club yesterday and they lost again. I am told Andrey lost two hundred roubles.

MASHA (*indifferently*). Well, it can't be helped now.

IRINA. A fortnight ago he lost money, in December he lost money. I wish he'd make haste and lose everything, then perhaps we should go away from this town. My God, every night I dream of Moscow, it's perfect madness (*laughs*). We'll move there in June and there is still left February, March, April, May . . . almost half a year.

MASHA. The only thing is Natasha must not hear of his losses.

IRINA. I don't suppose she cares.

(TCHEBUTYKIN, *who has only just got off his bed—he has been resting after dinner—comes into the dining-room combing his beard, then sits down to the table and takes a newspaper out of his pocket.*)

MASHA. Here he is . . . has he paid his rent?

IRINA (*laughs*). No. Not a kopeck for eight months. Evidently he has forgotten.

MASHA (*laughs*). How gravely he sits. (*They all laugh; a pause.*)

IRINA. Why are you so quiet, Alexandr Ignatyevitch?

VERSHININ. I don't know. I am longing for tea. I'd give half my life for a glass of tea. I have had nothing to eat since the morning.

TCHEBUTYKIN. Irina Sergeyevna!

IRINA. What is it?

TCHEBUTYKIN. Come here. *Venez ici.* (IRINA *goes and sits down at the table*). I can't do without you. (IRINA *lays out the cards for patience.*)

VERSHININ. Well, if they won't bring tea, let us discuss something.

TUSENBACH. By all means. What?

VERSHININ. What? Let us dream . . . for instance of the life that will come after us, in two or three hundred years.

TUSENBACH. Well? When we are dead, men will fly in balloons, change the fashion of their coats, will discover a sixth sense, perhaps, and develop it, but life will remain just the same, difficult, full of mysteries and happiness. In a thousand years man will sigh just the same, "Ah, how hard life is," and yet just as now he will be afraid of death and not want it.

VERSHININ (*after a moment's thought*). Well, I don't know. . . . It seems to me that everything on earth is bound to change by degrees and is already changing before our eyes. In two or three hundred, perhaps in a thousand years—the time does not matter—a new, happy life will come. We shall have no share in that life, of

course, but we are living for it, we are working, well, yes, and suffering for it, we are creating it —and that alone is the purpose of our existence, and is our happiness, if you like.

(MASHA *laughs softly.*)

TUSENBACH. What is it ?

MASHA. I don't know. I've been laughing all day.

VERSHININ. I was at the same school as you were, I did not go to the Military Academy ; I read a great deal, but I do not know how to choose my books, and very likely I read quite the wrong things, and yet the longer I live the more I want to know. My hair is turning grey, I am almost an old man, but I know so little, oh so little ! But all the same I fancy that I do know and thoroughly grasp what is essential and matters most. And how I should like to make you see that there is no happiness for us, that there ought not to be and will not be. . . . We must work and work, and happiness is the portion of our remote descendants (*a pause*). If it is not for me, at least it is for the descendants of my descendants. . . .

(FEDOTIK *and* RODDEY *appear in the dining-room ; they sit down and sing softly, playing the guitar.*)

TUSENBACH. You think it's no use even dreaming of happiness ! But what if I am happy ?

VERSHININ. No.

TUSENBACH (*flinging up his hands and laughing*). It is clear we don't understand each other. Well, how am I to convince you ?

(MASHA *laughs softly.*)

TUSENBACH (*holds up a finger to her*). Laugh! (*To* VERSHININ) Not only in two or three hundred years but in a million years life will be just the same; it does not change, it remains stationary, following its own laws which we have nothing to do with or which, anyway, we shall never find out. Migratory birds, cranes for instance, fly backwards and forwards, and whatever ideas, great or small, stray through their minds, they will still go on flying just the same without knowing where or why. They fly and will continue to fly, however philosophic they may become; and it doesn't matter how philosophical they are so long as they go on flying. . . .

MASHA. But still there is a meaning?

TUSENBACH. Meaning. . . . Here it is snowing. What meaning is there in that? (*a pause*).

MASHA. I think man ought to have faith or ought to seek a faith, or else his life is empty, empty. . . . To live and not to understand why cranes fly; why children are born; why there are stars in the sky. . . . One must know what one is living for or else it is all nonsense and waste (*a pause*).

VERSHININ. And yet one is sorry that youth is over. . . .

MASHA. Gogol says: it's dull living in this world, friends!

TUSENBACH. And I say: it is difficult to argue with you, my friends, God bless you. . . .

TCHEBUTYKIN (*reading the newspaper*). Balzac was married at Berditchev.

(IRINA *hums softly.*)

TCHEBUTYKIN. I really must put that down in my book (*writes*) Balzac was married at Berditchev (*reads the paper*).

IRINA (*lays out the cards for patience, dreamily*). Balzac was married at Berditchev.

TUSENBACH. The die is cast. You know, Marya Sergeyevna, I've resigned my commission.

MASHA. So I hear. And I see nothing good in that. I don't like civilians.

TUSENBACH. Never mind . . . (*gets up*). I am not good-looking enough for a soldier. But that does not matter, though . . . I am going to work. If only for one day in my life, to work so that I come home at night tired out and fall asleep as soon as I get into bed . . . (*going into the dining-room*). Workmen must sleep soundly!

FEDOTIK (*to* IRINA). I bought these chalks for you just now as I passed the shop. . . . And this penknife. . . .

IRINA. You've got into the way of treating me as though I were little, but I am grown up, you know . . . (*takes the chalks and the penknife, joyfully*). How lovely!

FEDOTIK. And I bought a knife for myself . . . look . . . one blade, and another blade, a third, and this is for the ears, and here are scissors, and that's for cleaning the nails. . . .

RODDEY (*loudly*). Doctor, how old are you?

TCHEBUTYKIN. I? Thirty-two (*laughter*).

FEDOTIK. I'll show you another patience . . . (*lays out the cards*).

(*The samovar is brought in;* ANFISA *is at the samovar; a little later* NATASHA *comes*

in and is also busy at the table; SOLYONY *comes in, and after greeting the others sits down at the table.*)

VERSHININ. What a wind there is!

MASHA. Yes. I am sick of the winter. I've forgotten what summer is like.

IRINA. It's coming out right, I see. We shall go to Moscow.

FEDOTIK. No, it's not coming out. You see, the eight is over the two of spades (*laughs*). So that means you won't go to Moscow.

TCHEBUTYKIN (*reads from the newspaper*). Tsi-tsi-kar. Smallpox is raging here.

ANFISA (*going up to* MASHA). Masha, come to tea, my dear. (*To* VERSHININ) Come, your honour . . . excuse me, sir, I have forgotten your name. . . .

MASHA. Bring it here, nurse, I am not going there.

IRINA. Nurse!

ANFISA. I am coming!

NATASHA (*to* SOLYONY). Little babies understand very well. "Good morning, Bobik, good morning, darling," I said. He looked at me in quite a special way. You think I say that because I am a mother, but no, I assure you! He is an extraordinary child.

SOLYONY. If that child were mine, I'd fry him in a frying-pan and eat him (*takes his glass, comes into the drawing-room and sits down in a corner*).

NATASHA (*covers her face with her hands*). Rude, ill-bred man!

MASHA. Happy people don't notice whether it

is winter or summer. I fancy if I lived in Moscow I should not mind what the weather was like. . . .

VERSHININ. The other day I was reading the diary of a French minister written in prison. The minister was condemned for the Panama affair. With what enthusiasm and delight he describes the birds he sees from the prison window, which he never noticed before when he was a minister. Now that he is released, of course he notices birds no more than he did before. In the same way, you won't notice Moscow when you live in it. We have no happiness and never do have, we only long for it.

TUSENBACH (*takes a box from the table*). What has become of the sweets?

IRINA. Solyony has eaten them.

TUSENBACH. All?

ANFISA (*handing tea*). There's a letter for you, sir.

VERSHININ. For me? (*takes the letter*). From my daughter (*reads*). Yes, of course. . . . Excuse me, Marya Sergeyevna, I'll slip away. I won't have tea (*gets up in agitation*). Always these upsets. . . .

MASHA. What is it? Not a secret?

VERSHININ (*in a low voice*). My wife has taken poison again. I must go. I'll slip off unnoticed. Horribly unpleasant it all is. (*Kisses* MASHA'S *hand*) My fine, dear, splendid woman. . . . I'll go this way without being seen. . . . (*goes out*).

ANFISA. Where is he off to? I've just given him his tea. . . . What a man.

MASHA (*getting angry*). Leave off! Don't

pester, you give one no peace . . . (*goes with her cup to the table*). You bother me, old lady.

ANFISA. Why are you so huffy ? Darling !

(*Andrey's voice :* " ANFISA ! ")

ANFISA (*mimicking*). Anfisa ! he sits there. . . . (*goes out*).

MASHA (*by the table in the dining-room, angrily*). Let me sit down ! (*mixes the cards on the table*). You take up all the table with your cards. Drink your tea !

IRINA. How cross you are, Masha !

MASHA. If I'm cross, don't talk to me. Don't interfere with me.

TCHEBUTYKIN (*laughing*). Don't touch her, don't touch her !

MASHA. You are sixty, but you talk rot like a schoolboy.

NATASHA (*sighs*). Dear Masha, why make use of such expressions in conversation ? With your attractive appearance I tell you straight out, you would be simply fascinating in a well-bred social circle if it were not for the things you say. *Je vous prie, pardonnez-moi, Marie, mais vous avez des manières un peu grossières.*

TUSENBACH (*suppressing a laugh*). Give me . . . give me . . . I think there is some brandy there.

NATASHA. *Il paraît que mon Bobik déjà ne dort pas*, he is awake. He is not well to-day. I must go to him, excuse me. . . . (*goes out*).

IRINA. Where has Alexandr Ignatyevitch gone ?

MASHA. Home. Something queer with his wife again.

TUSENBACH (*goes up to* SOLYONY *with a decanter of brandy in his hand*). You always sit alone, thinking, and there's no making out what you think about. Come, let us make it up. Let us have a drink of brandy. (*They drink.*) I shall have to play the piano all night, I suppose, play all sorts of trash. . . . Here goes!

SOLYONY. Why make it up? I haven't quarrelled with you.

TUSENBACH. You always make me feel as though something had gone wrong between us. You are a queer character, there's no denying that.

SOLYONY (*declaims*). I am strange, who is not strange! Be not wrath, Aleko!

TUSENBACH. I don't see what Aleko has got to do with it. . . .

SOLYONY. When I am *tête-à-tête* with somebody, I am all right, just like anyone else, but in company I am depressed, ill at ease and . . . say all sorts of idiotic things, but at the same time I am more conscientious and straightforward than many. And I can prove it. . . .

TUSENBACH. I often feel angry with you, you are always attacking me when we are in company, and yet I somehow like you. Here goes, I am going to drink a lot to-day. Let's drink!

SOLYONY. Let us (*drinks*). I have never had anything against you, Baron. But I have the temperament of Lermontov. (*In a low voice*) In fact I am rather like Lermontov to look at . . . so I am told (*takes out scent-bottle and sprinkles scent on his hands*).

TUSENBACH. I have sent in my papers. I've

had enough of it ! I have been thinking of it for five years and at last I have come up to the scratch. I am going to work.

SOLYONY (*declaims*). Be not wrath, Aleko. . . . Forget, forget thy dreams. . . .

(*While they are talking* ANDREY *comes in quietly with a book and sits down by a candle.*)

TUSENBACH. I am going to work.

TCHEBUTYKIN (*coming into the drawing-room with* IRINA). And the food too was real Caucasian stuff : onion soup and for the meat course *tchehartma*. . . .

SOLYONY. *Tcheremsha* is not meat at all, it's a plant rather like our onion.

TCHEBUTYKIN. No, my dear soul. It's not onion, but mutton roasted in a special way.

SOLYONY. But I tell you that *tcheremsha* is an onion.

TCHEBUTYKIN. And I tell you that *tchehartma* is mutton.

SOLYONY. And I tell you that *tcheremsha* is an onion.

TCHEBUTYKIN. What's the use of my arguing with you ? You have never been to the Caucasus or eaten *tchehartma*.

SOLYONY. I haven't eaten it because I can't bear it. *Tcheremsha* smells like garlic.

ANDREY (*imploringly*). That's enough ! Please !

TUSENBACH. When are the Carnival party coming ?

IRINA. They promised to come at nine, so they will be here directly.

TUSENBACH (*embraces* ANDREY *and sings*). "Oh my porch, oh my new porch . . . "

ANDREY (*dances and sings*). "With posts of maple wood. . . ."

TCHEBUTYKIN (*dances*). "And lattice work complete. . . ." (*laughter*).

TUSENBACH (*kisses* ANDREY). Hang it all, let us have a drink. Andryusha, let us drink to our everlasting friendship. I'll go to the University when you do, Andryusha.

SOLYONY. Which? There are two universities in Moscow.

ANDREY. There is only one university in Moscow.

SOLYONY. I tell you there are two.

ANDREY. There may be three for aught I care. So much the better.

SOLYONY. There are two universities in Moscow! (*a murmur and hisses*). There are two universities in Moscow: the old one and the new one. And if you don't care to hear, if what I say irritates you, I can keep quiet. I can even go into another room (*goes out at one of the doors*).

TUSENBACH. Bravo, bravo! (*laughs*). Friends, begin, I'll sit down and play! Funny fellow that Solyony. . . . (*sits down to the piano and plays a waltz*).

MASHA (*dances a waltz alone*). The baron is drunk, the baron is drunk, the baron is drunk.

(*Enter* NATASHA.)

NATASHA (*to* TCHEBUTYKIN). Ivan Romanitch! (*Says something to* TCHEBUTYKIN, *then goes out softly.* TCHEBUTYKIN *touches* TUSENBACH *on the shoulder and whispers something to him.*)

IRINA. What is it ?

TCHEBUTYKIN. It's time we were going. Good night.

TUSENBACH. Good night. It's time to be going.

IRINA. But I say . . . what about the Carnival party ?

ANDREY (*with embarrassment*). They won't be coming. You see, dear, Natasha says Bobik is not well, and so . . . In fact I know nothing about it, and don't care either.

IRINA (*shrugs her shoulders*). Bobik is not well !

MASHA. Well, it's not the first time we've had to lump it ! If we are turned out, we must go. (*To* IRINA) It's not Bobik that is ill, but she is a bit . . . (*taps her forehead with her finger*). Petty, vulgar creature !

(ANDREY *goes by door on right to his own room,* TCHEBUTYKIN *following him ; they are saying good-bye in the dining-room.*)

FEDOTIK. What a pity ! I was meaning to spend the evening, but of course if the child is ill . . . I'll bring him a toy to-morrow.

RODDEY (*loudly*). I had a nap to-day after dinner on purpose, I thought I would be dancing all night. . . . Why, it's only nine o'clock.

MASHA. Let us go into the street ; there we can talk. We'll decide what to do.

(*Sounds of "Good-bye ! Good night !" The good-humoured laugh of* TUSENBACH *is heard. All go out.* ANFISA *and the maidservant clear the table and put out the light. There is the sound of the nurse singing.* ANDREY

in his hat and coat, and TCHEBUTYKIN *come in quietly.*)

TCHEBUTYKIN. I never had time to get married, because life has flashed by like lightning and because I was passionately in love with your mother, who was married.

ANDREY. One shouldn't get married. One shouldn't, because it's boring.

TCHEBUTYKIN. That's all very well, but what about loneliness? Say what you like, it's a dreadful thing to be lonely, my dear boy. . . . But no matter, though!

ANDREY. Let's make haste and go.

TCHEBUTYKIN. What's the hurry? We have plenty of time.

ANDREY. I am afraid my wife may stop me.

TCHEBUTYKIN. Oh!

ANDREY. I am not going to play to-day, I shall just sit and look on. I don't feel well. . . . What am I to do, Ivan Romanitch, I am so short of breath?

TCHEBUTYKIN. It's no use asking me! I don't remember, dear boy. . . . I don't know. . . .

ANDREY. Let us go through the kitchen. (*They go out.*)

(*A ring, then another ring; there is a sound of voices and laughter.*)

IRINA (*enters*). What is it?

ANFISA (*in a whisper*). The mummers, all dressed up (*a ring*).

IRINA. Nurse, dear, say there is no one at home. They must excuse us.

(ANFISA *goes out.* IRINA *walks about the room*

in hesitation; she is excited. Enter SOLYONY.)

SOLYONY (*in perplexity*). No one here. . . . Where are they all?

IRINA. They have gone home.

SOLYONY. How queer. Are you alone here?

IRINA. Yes (*a pause*). Good night.

SOLYONY. I behaved tactlessly, without sufficient restraint just now. But you are not like other people, you are pure and lofty, you see the truth. You alone can understand me. I love you, I love you deeply, infinitely.

IRINA. Good night! You must go.

SOLYONY. I can't live without you (*following her*). Oh, my bliss! (*through his tears*). Oh, happiness! Those glorious, exquisite, marvellous eyes such as I have never seen in any other woman.

IRINA (*coldly*). Don't, Vassily Vassilyitch!

SOLYONY. For the first time I am speaking of love to you, and I feel as though I were not on earth but on another planet (*rubs his forehead*). But there, it does not matter. There is no forcing kindness, of course. . . . But there must be no happy rivals. . . . There must not. . . . I swear by all that is sacred I will kill any rival. . . . O exquisite being!

(NATASHA *passes with a candle.*)

NATASHA (*peeps in at one door, then at another and passes by the door that leads to her husband's room*). Andrey is there. Let him read. Excuse me, Vassily Vassilyitch, I did not know you were here, and I am in my dressing-gown. . . .

SOLYONY. I don't care. Good-bye! (*goes out*).

NATASHA. You are tired, my poor, dear little girl! (*kisses* IRINA). You ought to go to bed earlier. . . .

IRINA. Is Bobik asleep?

NATASHA. He is asleep, but not sleeping quietly. By the way, dear, I keep meaning to speak to you, but either you are out or else I haven't the time. . . . I think Bobik's nursery is cold and damp. And your room is so nice for a baby. My sweet, my dear, you might move for a time into Olya's room!

IRINA (*not understanding*). Where?

(*The sound of a three-horse sledge with bells driving up to the door.*)

NATASHA. You would be in the same room with Olya, and Bobik in your room. He is such a poppet. I said to him to-day, "Bobik, you are mine, you are mine!" and he looked at me with his funny little eyes. (*A ring.*) That must be Olya. How late she is!

(*The maid comes up to* NATASHA *and whispers in her ear.*)

NATASHA. Protopopov? What a queer fellow he is! Protopopov has come, and asks me to go out with him in his sledge (*laughs*). How strange men are! . . . (*a ring*). Somebody has come. I might go for a quarter of an hour. . . . (*To the maid*) Tell him I'll come directly. (*A ring*) You hear . . . it must be Olya (*goes out*).

(*The maid runs out;* IRINA *sits lost in thought;* KULIGIN, OLGA *and* VERSHININ *come in.*)

KULIGIN. Well, this is a surprise! They said they were going to have an evening party.

VERSHININ. Strange! And when I went away half an hour ago they were expecting the Carnival people. . . .

IRINA. They have all gone.

KULIGIN. Has Masha gone too? Where has she gone? And why is Protopopov waiting below with his sledge? Whom is he waiting for?

IRINA. Don't ask questions. . . . I am tired.

KULIGIN. Oh, you little cross-patch. . . .

OLGA. The meeting is only just over. I am tired out. Our headmistress is ill and I have to take her place. Oh, my head, my head does ache; oh, my head! (*sits down*). Andrey lost two hundred roubles yesterday at cards. . . . The whole town is talking about it. . . .

KULIGIN. Yes, I am tired out by the meeting too (*sits down*).

VERSHININ. My wife took it into her head to give me a fright, she nearly poisoned herself. It's all right now, and I am glad, it's a relief. . . . So we are to go away? Very well, then, I will say good-night. Fyodor Ilyitch, let us go somewhere together! I can't stay at home, I absolutely can't. . . . Come along!

KULIGIN. I am tired. I am not coming (*gets up*). I am tired. Has my wife gone home?

IRINA. I expect so.

KULIGIN (*kisses* IRINA'S *hand*). Good-bye! I have all day to-morrow and next day to rest. Good-night! (*going*). I do want some tea. I was reckoning on spending the evening in pleasant company. . . . *O fallacem hominum spem!* . . . Accusative of exclamation

VERSHININ. Well, then, I must go alone (*goes out with* KULIGIN, *whistling*).

OLGA. My head aches, oh, how my head aches. . . . Andrey has lost at cards. . . . The whole town is talking about it. . . . I'll go and lie down (*is going*). To-morrow I shall be free. . . . Oh, goodness, how nice that is! To-morrow I am free, and the day after I am free. . . . My head does ache, oh, my head. . . . (*goes out*).

IRINA (*alone*). They have all gone away. There is no one left.

(*A concertina plays in the street, the nurse sings.*)

NATASHA (*in a fur cap and coat crosses the dining-room, followed by the maid*). I shall be back in half an hour. I shall only go a little way (*goes out*).

IRINA (*left alone, in dejection*). Oh, to go to Moscow, to Moscow!

CURTAIN.

ACT III

The Bedroom of OLGA *and* IRINA. *On left and right beds with screens round them. Past two o'clock in the night. Behind the scenes a bell is ringing on account of a fire in the town, which has been going on for some time. It can be seen that no one in the house has gone to bed yet. On the sofa* MASHA *is lying, dressed as usual in black. Enter* OLGA *and* ANFISA.

ANFISA. They are sitting below, under the stairs. . . . I said to them, "Come upstairs; why, you mustn't stay there"—they only cried. "We don't know where father is," they said. "What if he is burnt!" What an idea! And the poor souls in the yard . . . they are all undressed too.

OLGA (*taking clothes out of the cupboard*). Take this grey dress . . . and this one . . . and the blouse too . . . and that skirt, nurse. . . . Oh dear, what a dreadful thing! Kirsanov Street is burnt to the ground, it seems. . . . Take this . . . take this . . . (*throws clothes into her arms*). The Vershinins have had a fright, poor things. . . . Their house was very nearly burnt. Let them stay the night here . . . we can't let them go home. . . . Poor Fedotik has had everything burnt, he has not a thing left. . . .

ANFISA. You had better call Ferapont, Olya darling, I can't carry it all. . . .

OLGA (*rings*). No one will answer the bell (*at the door*). Come here, whoever is there! (*Through the open door can be seen a window red with fire; the fire brigade is heard passing the house*). How awful it is! And how sickening!

(*Enter* FERAPONT.)

OLGA. Here take these, carry them downstairs. . . . The Kolotilin young ladies are downstairs . . . give it to them . . . and give this too.

FERAPONT. Yes, miss. In 1812 Moscow was burnt too. . . . Mercy on us! The French marvelled.

OLGA. You can go now.

FERAPONT. Yes, miss (*goes out*).

OLGA. Nurse darling, give them everything. We don't want anything, give it all to them. . . . I am tired, I can hardly stand on my feet. . . . We mustn't let the Vershinins go home. . . . The little girls can sleep in the drawing-room, and Alexandr Ignatyevitch down below at the baron's. . . . Fedotik can go to the baron's, too, or sleep in our dining-room. . . . As ill-luck will have it, the doctor is drunk, frightfully drunk, and no one can be put in his room. And Vershinin's wife can be in the drawing-room too.

ANFISA (*wearily*). Olya darling, don't send me away; don't send me away!

OLGA. That's nonsense, nurse. No one is sending you away.

ANFISA (*lays her head on* OLGA'S *shoulder*). My own, my treasure, I work, I do my best. . . .

I'm getting weak, everyone will say "Be off!" And where am I to go? Where? I am eighty. Eighty-one.

OLGA. Sit down, nurse darling. . . . You are tired, poor thing . . . (*makes her sit down*). Rest, dear good nurse. . . . How pale you are!

(*Enter* NATASHA.)

NATASHA. They are saying we must form a committee at once for the assistance of those whose houses have been burnt. Well, that's a good idea. Indeed, one ought always to be ready to help the poor, it's the duty of the rich. Bobik and baby Sophie are both asleep, sleeping as though nothing were happening. There are such a lot of people everywhere, wherever one goes, the house is full. There is influenza in the town now; I am so afraid the children may get it.

OLGA (*not listening*). In this room one does not see the fire, it's quiet here.

NATASHA. Yes . . . my hair must be untidy (*in front of the looking-glass*) They say I have grown fatter . . . but it's not true! Not a bit! Masha is asleep, she is tired out, poor dear . . . (*To* ANFISA, *coldly*) Don't dare to sit down in my presence! Get up! Go out of the room! ANFISA *goes out*; *a pause*). Why you keep that old woman, I can't understand!

OLGA (*taken aback*). Excuse me, I don't understand either. . . .

NATASHA. She is no use here. She is a peasant; she ought to be in the country. . . . You spoil people! I like order in the house! There ought to be no useless servants in the house (*strokes her*

cheek). You are tired, poor darling. Our headmistress is tired! When baby Sophie is a big girl and goes to the high-school, I shall be afraid of you.

OLGA. I shan't be headmistress.

NATASHA. You will be elected, Olya. That's a settled thing.

OLGA. I shall refuse. I can't. . . . It's too much for me . . . (*drinks water*). You were so rude to nurse just now. . . . Excuse me, I can't endure it. . . . It makes me feel faint.

NATASHA (*perturbed*). Forgive me, Olya; forgive me. . . . I did not mean to hurt your feelings.

(MASHA *gets up, takes her pillow, and goes out in a rage.*)

OLGA. You must understand, my dear, it may be that we have been strangely brought up, but I can't endure it. . . . Such an attitude oppresses me, it makes me ill. . . . I feel simply unnerved by it. . . .

NATASHA. Forgive me; forgive me . . . (*kisses her*).

OLGA. The very slightest rudeness, a tactless word, upsets me . . .

NATASHA. I often say too much, that's true, but you must admit, dear, that she might just as well be in the country.

OLGA. She has been thirty years with us.

NATASHA. But now she can't work! Either I don't understand, or you won't understand me. She is not fit for work. She does nothing but sleep or sit still.

OLGA. Well, let her sit still.

NATASHA (*surprised*). How, sit still? Why, she is a servant. (*Through tears*) I don't understand you, Olya. I have a nurse to look after the children as well as a wet nurse for baby, and we have a housemaid and a cook, what do we want that old woman for? What's the use of her?

(*The alarm bell rings behind the scenes.*)

OLGA. This night has made me ten years older.

NATASHA. We must come to an understanding, Olya. You are at the high-school, I am at home; you are teaching while I look after the house, and if I say anything about the servants, I know what I'm talking about; I do know what I am talking about. . . . And that old thief, that old hag . . . (*stamps*), that old witch shall clear out of the house to-morrow! . . . I won't have people annoy me! I won't have it! (*feeling that she has gone too far*). Really, if you don't move downstairs, we shall always be quarrelling. It's awful.

(*Enter* KULIGIN.)

KULIGIN. Where is Masha? It's time to be going home. The fire is dying down, so they say (*stretches*). Only one part of the town has been burnt, and yet there was a wind; it seemed at first as though the whole town would be destroyed (*sits down*). I am exhausted. Olya, my dear . . . I often think if it had not been for Masha I should have married you. You are so good. . . . I am tired out (*listens*).

OLGA. What is it?

KULIGIN. It is unfortunate the doctor should have a drinking bout just now; he is helplessly

drunk. Most unfortunate (*gets up*). Here he comes, I do believe. . . . Do you hear? Yes, he is coming this way . . . (*laughs*). What a man he is, really. . . . I shall hide (*goes to the cupboard and stands in the corner*). Isn't he a ruffian!

OLGA. He has not drunk for two years and now he has gone and done it . . . (*walks away with* NATASHA *to the back of the room*).

(TCHEBUTYKIN *comes in; walking as though sober without staggering, he walks across the room, stops, looks round; then goes up to the washing-stand and begins to wash his hands.*)

TCHEBUTYKIN (*morosely*). The devil take them all . . . damn them all. They think I am a doctor, that I can treat all sorts of complaints, and I really know nothing about it, I have forgotten all I did know, I remember nothing, absolutely nothing (OLGA *and* NATASHA *go out unnoticed by him*). The devil take them. Last Wednesday I treated a woman at Zasyp—she died, and it's my fault that she died. Yes . . . I did know something twenty-five years ago, but now I remember nothing, nothing. Perhaps I am not a man at all but only pretend to have arms and legs and head; perhaps I don't exist at all and only fancy that I walk about, eat and sleep (*weeps*). Oh, if only I did not exist! (*leaves off weeping, morosely*). I don't care! I don't care a scrap! (*a pause*). Goodness knows. . . . The day before yesterday there was a conversation at the club: they talked about Shakespeare, Voltaire. . . . I have read nothing, nothing at all, but I looked as though I had read

them. And the others did the same as I did. The vulgarity! The meanness! And that woman I killed on Wednesday came back to my mind . . . and it all came back to my mind and everything seemed nasty, disgusting and all awry in my soul. . . . I went and got drunk. . . .

(*Enter* IRINA, VERSHININ *and* TUSENBACH; TUSENBACH *is wearing a fashionable new civilian suit.*)

IRINA. Let us sit here. No one will come here.

VERSHININ. If it had not been for the soldiers, the whole town would have been burnt down. Splendid fellows! (*rubs his hands with pleasure*). They are first-rate men! Splendid fellows!

KULIGIN (*going up to them*). What time is it?

TUSENBACH. It's past three. It's getting light already.

IRINA. They are all sitting in the dining-room. No one seems to think of going. And that Solyony of yours is sitting there too. . . . (*To* TCHEBUTYKIN) You had better go to bed, doctor.

TCHEBUTYKIN. It's all right. . . . Thank you! (*combs his beard*).

KULIGIN (*laughs*). You are a bit fuddled, Ivan Romanitch! (*slaps him on the shoulder*). Bravo! *In vino veritas*, the ancients used to say.

TUSENBACH. Everyone is asking me to get up a concert for the benefit of the families whose houses have been burnt down.

IRINA. Why, who is there? . . .

TUSENBACH. We could get it up, if we wanted to. Marya Sergeyevna plays the piano splendidly, to my thinking.

KULIGIN. Yes, she plays splendidly.

IRINA. She has forgotten. She has not played for three . . . or four years.

TUSENBACH. There is absolutely no one who understands music in this town, not one soul, but I do understand and on my honour I assure you that Marya Sergeyevna plays magnificently, almost with genius.

KULIGIN. You are right, Baron. I am very fond of her; Masha, I mean. She is a good sort.

TUSENBACH. To be able to play so gloriously and to know that no one understands you!

KULIGIN (*sighs*). Yes. . . . But would it be suitable for her to take part in a concert? (*a pause*). I know nothing about it, my friends. Perhaps it would be all right. There is no denying that our director is a fine man, indeed a very fine man, very intelligent, but he has such views. . . . Of course it is not his business, still if you like I'll speak to him about it.

(TCHEBUTYKIN *takes up a china clock and examines it.*)

VERSHININ. I got dirty all over at the fire. I am a sight (*a pause*). I heard a word dropped yesterday about our brigade being transferred ever so far away. Some say to Poland, and others to Tchita.

TUSENBACH. I've heard something about it too. Well! The town will be a wilderness then.

IRINA. We shall go away too.

TCHEBUTYKIN (*drops the clock, which smashes*). To smithereens!

KULIGIN (*picking up the pieces*). To smash such a valuable thing—oh, Ivan Romanitch, Ivan

Romanitch! I should give you minus zero for conduct!

IRINA. That was mother's clock.

TCHEBUTYKIN. Perhaps. . . . Well, if it was hers, it was. Perhaps I did not smash it, but it only seems as though I had. Perhaps it only seems to us that we exist, but really we are not here at all. I don't know anything—nobody knows anything. (*By the door*) What are you staring at? Natasha has got a little affair on with Protopopov, and you don't see it. . . . You sit here and see nothing, while Natasha has a little affair on with Protopopov . . . (*sings*). May I offer you this date? . . . (*goes out*).

VERSHININ. Yes . . . (*laughs*). How very queer it all is, really! (*a pause*). When the fire began I ran home as fast as I could. I went up and saw our house was safe and sound and out of danger, but my little girls were standing in the doorway in their nightgowns; their mother was nowhere to be seen, people were bustling about, horses and dogs were running about, and my children's faces were full of alarm, horror, entreaty, and I don't know what; it wrung my heart to see their faces. My God, I thought, what more have these children to go through in the long years to come! I took their hands and ran along with them, and could think of nothing else but what more they would have to go through in this world! (*a pause*). When I came to your house I found their mother here, screaming, angry.

(MASHA *comes in with the pillow and sits down on the sofa.*)

VERSHININ. And while my little girls were standing in the doorway in their nightgowns and the street was red with the fire, and there was a fearful noise, I thought that something like it used to happen years ago when the enemy would suddenly make a raid and begin plundering and burning. . . . And yet, in reality, what a difference there is between what is now and has been in the past! And when a little more time has passed—another two or three hundred years—people will look at our present manner of life with horror and derision, and everything of to-day will seem awkward and heavy, and very strange and uncomfortable. Oh, what a wonderful life that will be—what a wonderful life! (*laughs*). Forgive me, here I am airing my theories again! Allow me to go on. I have such a desire to talk about the future. I am in the mood (*a pause*). It's as though everyone were asleep. And so, I say, what a wonderful life it will be! Can you only imagine? . . . Here there are only three of your sort in the town now, but in generations to come there will be more and more and more; and the time will come when everything will be changed and be as you would have it; they will live in your way, and later on you too will be out of date—people will be born who will be better than you. . . . (*laughs*). I am in such a strange state of mind to-day. I have a fiendish longing for life. . . . (*sings*). Young and old are bound by love, and precious are its pangs . . . (*laughs*).

MASHA. Tram-tam-tam!

VERSHININ. Tam-tam!

MASHA. Tra-ra-ra ?

VERSHININ. Tra-ta-ta ! (*laughs*).

(*Enter* FEDOTIK.)

FEDOTIK (*dances*). Burnt to ashes ! Burnt to ashes ! Everything I had in the world (*laughter*).

IRINA. A queer thing to joke about. Is everything burnt ?

FEDOTIK (*laughs*). Everything I had in the world. Nothing is left. My guitar is burnt, and the camera and all my letters. . . . And the notebook I meant to give you—that's burnt too.

(*Enter* SOLYONY.)

IRINA. No ; please go, Vassily Vassilyitch. You can't stay here.

SOLYONY. How is it the baron can be here and I can't ?

VERSHININ. We must be going, really. How is the fire ?

SOLYONY. They say it is dying down. No, I really can't understand why the baron may be here and not I (*takes out a bottle of scent and sprinkles himself*).

VERSHININ. Tram-tam-tam !

MASHA. Tram-tam !

VERSHININ (*laughs, to* SOLYONY). Let us go into the dining-room.

SOLYONY. Very well ; we'll make a note of it. I might explain my meaning further, but fear I may provoke the geese . . . (*looking at* TUSENBACH). Chook, chook, chook ! . . . (*goes out with* VERSHININ *and* FEDOTIK).

IRINA. How that horrid Solyony has made

the room smell of tobacco! . . . (*In surprise*) The baron is asleep! Baron, baron!

TUSENBACH (*waking up*). I am tired, though. . . . The brickyard. I am not talking in my sleep. I really am going to the brickyard directly, to begin work. . . . It's nearly settled. (*To* IRINA, *tenderly*) You are so pale and lovely and fascinating. . . . It seems to me as though your paleness sheds a light through the dark air. . . . You are melancholy; you are dissatisfied with life. . . . Ah, come with me; let us go and work together!

MASHA. Nikolay Lvovitch, do go!

TUSENBACH (*laughing*). Are you here? I didn't see you . . . (*kisses* IRINA'S *hand*). Good-bye, I am going. . . . I look at you now, and I remember as though it were long ago how on your name-day you talked of the joy of work, and were so gay and confident. . . . And what a happy life I was dreaming of then! What has become of it? (*kisses her hand*). There are tears in your eyes. Go to bed, it's getting light . . . it is nearly morning. . . . If it were granted to me to give my life for you!

MASHA. Nikolay Lvovitch, do go! Come, really. . . .

TUSENBACH. I am going (*goes out*).

MASHA (*lying down*). Are you asleep, Fyodor?

KULIGIN. Eh?

MASHA. You had better go home.

KULIGIN. My darling Masha, my precious girl! . . .

IRINA. She is tired out. Let her rest, Fedya.

KULIGIN. I'll go at once. . . . My dear, charming wife! . . . I love you, my only one! . . .

MASHA (*angrily*). *Amo, amas, amat; amamus, amatis, amant.*

KULIGIN (*laughs*). Yes, really she is wonderful. You have been my wife for seven years, and it seems to me as though we were only married yesterday. Honour bright! Yes, really you are a wonderful woman! I am content, I am content, I am content!

MASHA. I am bored, I am bored, I am bored! . . . (*gets up and speaks, sitting down*). And there's something I can't get out of my head. . . . It's simply revolting. It sticks in my head like a nail; I must speak of it. I mean about Andrey. . . . He has mortgaged this house in the bank and his wife has grabbed all the money, and you know the house does not belong to him alone, but to us four! He ought to know that, if he is a decent man.

KULIGIN. Why do you want to bother about it, Masha? What is it to you? Andryusha is in debt all round, so there it is.

MASHA. It's revolting, anyway (*lies down*).

KULIGIN. We are not poor. I work—I go to the high-school, and then I give private lessons. . . . I do my duty. . . . There's no nonsense about me. *Omnia mea mecum porto*, as the saying is.

MASHA. I want nothing, but it's the injustice that revolts me (*a pause*). Go, Fyodor.

KULIGIN (*kisses her*). You are tired, rest for

half an hour, and I'll sit and wait for you. . . . Sleep . . . (*goes*). I am content, I am content, I am content (*goes out*).

IRINA. Yes, how petty our Andrey has grown, how dull and old he has become beside that woman! At one time he was working to get a professorship and yesterday he was boasting of having succeeded at last in becoming a member of the Rural Board. He is a member, and Protopopov is chairman. . . . The whole town is laughing and talking of it and he is the only one who sees and knows nothing. . . . And here everyone has been running to the fire while he sits still in his room and takes no notice. He does nothing but play his violin . . . (*nervously*). Oh, it's awful, awful, awful! (*weeps*). I can't bear it any more, I can't! I can't, I can't!

(OLGA *comes in and begins tidying up her table.*)

IRINA (*sobs loudly*). Turn me out, turn me out, I can't bear it any more!

OLGA (*alarmed*). What is it? What is it, darling?

IRINA (*sobbing*). Where? Where has it all gone? Where is it? Oh, my God, my God! I have forgotten everything, everything . . . everything is in a tangle in my mind. . . . I don't remember the Italian for window or ceiling. . . . I am forgetting everything; every day I forget something more and life is slipping away and will never come back, we shall never, never go to Moscow. . . . I see that we shan't go. . . .

OLGA. Darling, darling. . . .

IRINA (*restraining herself*). Oh, I am wretched. . . . I can't work, I am not going to work. I have had enough of it, enough of it! I have been a telegraph clerk and now I have a job in the town council and I hate and despise every bit of the work they give me. . . . I am nearly twenty-four, I have been working for years, my brains are drying up, I am getting thin and old and ugly and there is nothing, nothing, not the slightest satisfaction, and time is passing and one feels that one is moving away from a real, fine life, moving farther and farther away and being drawn into the depths. I am in despair and I don't know how it is I am alive and have not killed myself yet. . . .

OLGA. Don't cry, my child, don't cry. It makes me miserable.

IRINA. I am not crying, I am not crying. . . . It's over. . . . There, I am not crying now. I won't . . . I won't.

OLGA. Darling, I am speaking to you as a sister, as a friend, if you care for my advice, marry the baron!

(IRINA *weeps*.)

OLGA (*softly*). You know you respect him, you think highly of him. . . . It's true he is ugly, but he is such a thoroughly nice man, so good. . . . One doesn't marry for love, but to do one's duty. . . . That's what I think, anyway, and I would marry without love. Whoever proposed to me I would marry him, if only he were a good man. . . . I would even marry an old man. . . .

IRINA. I kept expecting we should move to Moscow and there I should meet my real one. I've been dreaming of him, loving him. . . . But it seems that was all nonsense, nonsense. . . .

OLGA (*puts her arms round her sister*). My darling, lovely sister, I understand it all; when the baron left the army and came to us in a plain coat, I thought he looked so ugly that it positively made me cry. . . . He asked me, "Why are you crying?" How could I tell him! But if God brought you together I should be happy. That's a different thing you know, quite different.

(NATASHA *with a candle in her hand walks across the stage from door on right to door on left without speaking.*)

MASHA (*sits up*). She walks about as though it were she had set fire to the town.

OLGA. Masha, you are silly. The very silliest of the family, that's you. Please forgive me (*a pause*).

MASHA. I want to confess my sins, dear sisters. My soul is yearning. I am going to confess to you and never again to anyone. . . . I'll tell you this minute (*softly*). It's my secret, but you must know everything. . . . I can't be silent . . . (*a pause*). I am in love, I am in love. . . . I love that man. . . . You have just seen him. . . . Well, I may as well say it straight out. I love Vershinin.

OLGA (*going behind her screen*). Leave off. I don't hear anyway.

MASHA. But what am I to do? (*clutches her head*). At first I thought him queer . . . then

I was sorry for him . . . then I came to love him . . . to love him with his voice, his words, his misfortunes, his two little girls. . . .

OLGA (*behind the screen*). I don't hear you anyway. Whatever silly things you say I shan't hear them.

MASHA. Oh, Olya, you are silly. I love him—so that's my fate. It means that that's my lot. . . . And he loves me. . . . It's all dreadful. Yes? Is it wrong? (*takes* IRINA *by the hand and draws her to herself*). Oh, my darling. . . . How are we going to live our lives, what will become of us? . . . When one reads a novel it all seems stale and easy to understand, but when you are in love yourself you see that no one knows anything and we all have to settle things for ourselves. . . . My darling, my sister. . . . I have confessed it to you, now I'll hold my tongue. . . . I'll be like Gogol's madman . . . silence . . . silence. . . .

(*Enter* ANDREY *and after him* FERAPONT.)

ANDREY (*angrily*). What do you want? I can't make it out.

FERAPONT (*in the doorway, impatiently*). I've told you ten times already, Andrey Sergeyevitch.

ANDREY. In the first place I am not Andrey Sergeyevitch, but your honour, to you!

FERAPONT. The firemen ask leave, your honour, to go through the garden on their way to the river. Or else they have to go round and round, an awful nuisance for them.

ANDREY. Very good. Tell them, very good. (FERAPONT *goes out.*) I am sick of them. Where

is Olga? (OLGA *comes from behind the screen.*) I've come to ask you for the key of the cupboard, I have lost mine. You've got one, it's a little key.

(OLGA *gives him the key in silence;* IRINA *goes behind her screen; a pause.*)

ANDREY. What a tremendous fire! Now it's begun to die down. Hang it all, that Ferapont made me so cross I said something silly to him. Your honour . . . (*a pause*). Why don't you speak, Olya? (*a pause*). It's time to drop this foolishness and sulking all about nothing. . . . You are here, Masha, and you too, Irina—very well, then, let us have things out thoroughly, once for all. What have you against me? What is it?

OLGA. Leave off, Andryusha. Let us talk to-morrow (*nervously*). What an agonising night!

ANDREY (*greatly confused*). Don't excite yourself. I ask you quite coolly, what have you against me? Tell me straight out.

(VERSHININ'S *voice: Tram-tam-tam!*)

MASHA (*standing up, loudly*). Tra-ta-ta! (*To* OLGA) Good night, Olya, God bless you . . . (*goes behind the screen and kisses* IRINA). Sleep well. . . . Good night, Andrey. You'd better leave them now, they are tired out . . . you can go into things to-morrow (*goes out*).

OLGA. Yes, really, Andryusha, let us put it off till to-morrow . . . (*goes behind her screen*). It's time we were in bed.

ANDREY. I'll say what I have to say and then go. Directly. . . . First, you have something

against Natasha, my wife, and I've noticed that from the very day of my marriage. Natasha is a splendid woman, conscientious, straightforward and honourable—that's my opinion! I love and respect my wife, do you understand? I respect her, and I insist on other people respecting her too. I repeat, she is a conscientious, honourable woman, and all your disagreements are simply caprice, or rather the whims of old maids. Old maids never like and never have liked their sisters-in-law—that's the rule (*a pause*). Secondly, you seem to be cross with me for not being a professor, not working at something learned. But I am in the service of the Zemstvo, I am a member of the Rural Board, and I consider this service just as sacred and elevated as the service of learning. I am a member of the Rural Board and I am proud of it, if you care to know . . . (*a pause*). Thirdly . . . there's something else I have to say. . . . I have mortgaged the house without asking your permission. . . . For that I am to blame, yes, and I ask your pardon for it. I was driven to it by my debts . . . thirty-five thousand. . . . I am not gambling now—I gave up cards long ago; but the chief thing I can say in self-defence is that you are, so to say, of the privileged sex—you get a pension . . . while I had not . . . my wages, so to speak . . . (*a pause*).

KULIGIN (*at the door*). Isn't Masha here? (*Perturbed*) Where is she? It's strange . . . (*goes out*).

ANDREY. They won't listen. Natasha is an excellent, conscientious woman (*paces up and*

down the stage in silence, then stops). When I married her, I thought we should be happy . . . happy, all of us. . . . But, my God! (*weeps*). Dear sisters, darling sisters, you must not believe what I say, you mustn't believe it . . . (*goes out*).

KULIGIN (*at the door, uneasily*). Where is Masha? Isn't Masha here? How strange! (*goes out*).

(*The firebell rings in the street. The stage is empty.*)

IRINA (*behind the screen*). Olya! Who is that knocking on the floor?

OLGA. It's the doctor, Ivan Romanitch. He is drunk.

IRINA. What a troubled night! (*a pause*). Olya! (*peeps out from behind the screen*). Have you heard? The brigade is going to be taken away; they are being transferred to some place very far off.

OLGA. That's only a rumour.

IRINA. Then we shall be alone. . . . Olya!

OLGA. Well?

IRINA. My dear, my darling, I respect the baron, I think highly of him, he is a fine man—I will marry him, I consent, only let us go to Moscow! I entreat you, do let us go! There's nothing in the world better than Moscow! Let us go, Olya! Let us go!

CURTAIN.

ACT IV

Old garden of the PROZOROVS' *house. A long avenue of fir trees, at the end of which is a view of the river. On the further side of the river there is a wood. On the right the verandah of the house; on the table in it are bottles and glasses; evidently they have just been drinking champagne. It is twelve o'clock in the day. People pass occasionally from the street across the garden to the river; five soldiers pass rapidly.*

TCHEBUTYKIN, *in an affable mood, which persists throughout the act, is sitting in an easy chair in the garden, waiting to be summoned; he is wearing a military cap and has a stick.* IRINA, KULIGIN *with a decoration on his breast and with no moustache, and* TUSENBACH, *standing on the verandah, are saying good-bye to* FEDOTIK *and* RODDEY, *who are going down the steps; both officers are in marching uniform.*

TUSENBACH (*kissing* FEDOTIK). You are a good fellow; we've got on so happily together. (*Kisses* RODDEY) Once more. . . . Good-bye, my dear boy. . . .

IRINA. Till we meet again!

FEDOTIK. No, it's good-bye for good; we shall never meet again.

KULIGIN. Who knows! (*wipes his eyes, smiles*). Here I am crying too.

IRINA. We shall meet some day.

FEDOTIK. In ten years, or fifteen perhaps? But then we shall scarcely recognise each other—we shall greet each other coldly . . . (*Takes a snapshot*) Stand still. . . . Once more, for the last time.

RODDEY (*embraces* TUSENBACH). We shall not see each other again . . . (*kisses* IRINA'S *hand*). Thank you for everything, everything. . . .

FEDOTIK (*with vexation*). Oh, do wait!

TUSENBACH. Please God we shall meet again. Write to us. Be sure to write to us.

RODDEY (*taking a long look at the garden*). Good-bye, trees! (*Shouts*) Halloo! (*a pause*). Good-bye, echo!

KULIGIN. I shouldn't wonder if you get married in Poland. . . . Your Polish wife will clasp you in her arms and call you *kochany!* (*laughs*).

FEDOTIK (*looking at his watch*). We have less than an hour. Of our battery only Solyony is going on the barge; we are going with the rank and file. Three divisions of the battery are going to-day and three more to-morrow—and peace and quiet will descend upon the town.

TUSENBACH. And dreadful boredom too.

RODDEY. And where is Marya Sergeyevna?

KULIGIN. Masha is in the garden.

FEDOTIK. We must say good-bye to her.

RODDEY. Good-bye. We must go, or I shall begin to cry . . . (*hurriedly embraces* TUSENBACH *and* KULIGIN *and kisses* IRINA'S *hand*). We've had a splendid time here.

FEDOTIK (*to* KULIGIN). This is a little souvenir for you . . . a notebook with a pencil. . . . We'll go down here to the river . . . (*As they go away both look back.*)

RODDEY (*shouts*). Halloo-oo !

KULIGIN (*shouts*). Good-bye !

(RODDEY *and* FEDOTIK *meet* MASHA *in the background and say good-bye to her ; she walks away with them.*)

IRINA. They've gone . . . (*sits down on the bottom step of the verandah*).

TCHEBUTYKIN. They have forgotten to say good-bye to me.

IRINA. And what were you thinking about ?

TCHEBUTYKIN. Why, I somehow forgot, too. But I shall see them again soon, I am setting off to-morrow. Yes . . . I have one day more. In a year I shall be on the retired list. Then I shall come here again and shall spend the rest of my life near you. . . . There is only one year now before I get my pension (*puts a newspaper into his pocket and takes out another*). I shall come here to you and arrange my life quite differently. . . . I shall become such a quiet . . . God-fearing . . . well-behaved person.

IRINA. Well, you do need to arrange your life differently, dear Ivan Romanitch. You certainly ought to somehow.

TCHEBUTYKIN. Yes, I feel it. (*Softly hums*) "Tarara-boom-dee-ay—Tarara-boom-dee-ay."

KULIGIN. Ivan Romanitch is incorrigible ! Incorrigible !

TCHEBUTYKIN. You ought to take me in hand. Then I should reform.

IRINA. Fyodor has shaved off his moustache. I can't bear to look at him!

KULIGIN. Why, what's wrong?

TCHEBUTYKIN. I might tell you what your countenance looks like now, but I really can't.

KULIGIN. Well! It's the thing now, *modus vivendi*. Our head-master is clean-shaven and now I am second to him I have taken to shaving too. Nobody likes it, but I don't care. I am content. With moustache or without moustache I am equally content (*sits down*).

(*In the background* ANDREY *is wheeling a baby asleep in a perambulator.*)

IRINA. Ivan Romanitch, darling, I am dreadfully uneasy. You were on the boulevard yesterday, tell me what was it that happened?

TCHEBUTYKIN. What happened? Nothing. Nothing much (*reads the newspaper*). It doesn't matter!

KULIGIN. The story is that Solyony and the baron met yesterday on the boulevard near the theatre. . . .

TUSENBACH. Oh, stop it! Really . . . (*with a wave of his hand walks away into the house*).

KULIGIN. Near the theatre. . . . Solyony began pestering the baron and he couldn't keep his temper and said something offensive. . . .

TCHEBUTYKIN. I don't know. It's all nonsense.

KULIGIN. A teacher at a divinity school wrote "nonsense" at the bottom of an essay and the pupil puzzled over it thinking it was a Latin

word . . . (*laughs*). It was fearfully funny. . . . They say Solyony is in love with Irina and hates the baron. . . . That's natural. Irina is a very nice girl.

(*From the background behind the scenes, "Aa-oo! Halloo!"*)

IRINA (*starts*). Everything frightens me somehow to-day (*a pause*). All my things are ready, after dinner I shall send off my luggage. The baron and I are to be married to-morrow, to-morrow we go to the brickyard and the day after that I shall be in the school. A new life is beginning. God will help me! How will it fare with me? When I passed my exam. as a teacher I felt so happy, so blissful, that I cried . . . (*a pause*). The cart will soon be coming for my things. . . .

KULIGIN. That's all very well, but it does not seem serious. It's all nothing but ideas and very little that is serious. However, I wish you success with all my heart.

TCHEBUTYKIN (*moved to tenderness*). My good, delightful darling. . . . My heart of gold. . . .

KULIGIN. Well, to-day the officers will be gone and everything will go on in the old way. Whatever people may say, Masha is a true, good woman. I love her dearly and am thankful for my lot! . . . People have different lots in life. . . . There is a man called Kozyrev serving in the Excise here. He was at school with me, but he was expelled from the fifth form because he could never understand *ut consecutivum*. Now he is frightfully poor and ill, and when I meet him I say, "How are

you, *ut consecutivum*?" "Yes," he says, "just so—*consecutivum*" . . . and then he coughs. . . . Now I have always been successful, I am fortunate, I have even got the order of the Stanislav of the second degree and I am teaching others that *ut consecutivum*. Of course I am clever, cleverer than very many people, but happiness does not lie in that . . . (*a pause*).

(*In the house the "Maiden's Prayer" is played on the piano.*)

IRINA. To-morrow evening I shall not be hearing that "Maiden's Prayer," I shan't be meeting Protopopov . . . (*a pause*). Protopopov is sitting there in the drawing-room; he has come again to-day. . . .

KULIGIN. The head-mistress has not come yet?

IRINA. No. They have sent for her. If only you knew how hard it is for me to live here alone, without Olya. . . . Now that she is head-mistress and lives at the high-school and is busy all day long, I am alone, I am bored, I have nothing to do, and I hate the room I live in. . . . I have made up my mind, since I am not fated to be in Moscow, that so it must be. It must be destiny. There is no help for it. . . . It's all in God's hands, that's the truth. When Nikolay Lvovitch made me an offer again . . . I thought it over and made up my mind. . . . He is a good man, it's wonderful really how good he is. . . . And I suddenly felt as though my soul had grown wings, my heart felt so light and again I longed for work, work. . . . Only something happened yesterday, there is some mystery hanging over me.

TCHEBUTYKIN. Nonsense.

NATASHA (*at the window*). Our head-mistress!

KULIGIN. The head-mistress has come. Let us go in (*goes into the house with* IRINA).

TCHEBUTYKIN (*reads the newspaper, humming softly*). "Tarara-boom-dee-ay."

(MASHA *approaches; in the background* ANDREY *is pushing the perambulator.*)

MASHA. Here he sits, snug and settled.

TCHEBUTYKIN. Well, what then?

MASHA (*sits down*). Nothing . . . (*a pause*). Did you love my mother?

TCHEBUTYKIN. Very much.

MASHA. And did she love you?

TCHEBUTYKIN (*after a pause*). That I don't remember.

MASHA. Is my man here? It's just like our cook Marfa used to say about her policeman: is my man here?

TCHEBUTYKIN. Not yet.

MASHA. When you get happiness by snatches, by little bits, and then lose it, as I am losing it, by degrees one grows coarse and spiteful . . . (*Points to her bosom*) I'm boiling here inside . . . (*Looking at* ANDREY, *who is pushing the perambulator*) Here is our Andrey. . . . All our hopes are shattered. Thousands of people raised the bell, a lot of money and of labour was spent on it, and it suddenly fell and smashed. All at once, for no reason whatever. That's just how it is with Andrey. . . .

ANDREY. When will they be quiet in the house? There is such a noise.

TCHEBUTYKIN. Soon (*looks at his watch*). My watch is an old-fashioned one with a repeater . . . (*winds his watch, it strikes*). The first, the second, and the fifth batteries are going at one o'clock (*a pause*). And I am going to-morrow.

ANDREY. For good ?

TCHEBUTYKIN. I don't know. Perhaps I shall come back in a year. Though goodness knows. . . . It doesn't matter one way or another.

(*There is the sound of a harp and violin being played far away in the street.*)

ANDREY. The town will be empty. It's as though one put an extinguisher over it (*a pause*). Something happened yesterday near the theatre ; everyone is talking of it, and I know nothing about it.

TCHEBUTYKIN. It was nothing. Foolishness. Solyony began annoying the baron and he lost his temper and insulted him, and it came in the end to Solyony's having to challenge him (*looks at his watch*). It's time, I fancy. . . . It was to be at half-past twelve in the Crown forest that we can see from here beyond the river . . . Piff-paff ! (*laughs*). Solyony imagines he is a Lermontov and even writes verses. Joking apart, this is his third duel.

MASHA. Whose ?

TCHEBUTYKIN. Solyony's.

MASHA. And the baron's ?

TCHEBUTYKIN. What about the baron ? (*a pause*).

MASHA. My thoughts are in a muddle. . . . Anyway, I tell you, you ought not to let them do it. He may wound the baron or even kill him.

TCHEBUTYKIN. The baron is a very good fellow, but one baron more or less in the world, what does it matter? Let them! It doesn't matter. (*Beyond the garden a shout of "A a-oo! Halloo!"*) You can wait. That is Skvortsov, the second, shouting. He is in a boat (*a pause*).

ANDREY. In my opinion to take part in a duel, or to be present at it even in the capacity of a doctor, is simply immoral.

TCHEBUTYKIN. That only seems so. . . . We are not real, nothing in the world is real, we don't exist, but only seem to exist. . . . Nothing matters!

MASHA. How they keep on talking, talking all day long (*goes*). To live in such a climate, it may snow any minute, and then all this talk on the top of it (*stops*). I am not going indoors, I can't go in there. . . . When Vershinin comes, tell me . . . (*goes down the avenue*). And the birds are already flying south . . . (*looks up*). Swans or geese. . . . Darlings, happy things. . . . (*goes out*).

ANDREY. Our house will be empty. The officers are going, you are going, Irina is getting married, and I shall be left in the house alone.

TCHEBUTYKIN. What about your wife?

(*Enter* FERAPONT *with papers.*)

ANDREY. A wife is a wife. She is a straightforward, upright woman, good-natured, perhaps, but for all that there is something in her which makes her no better than some petty, blind, hairy animal. Anyway she is not a human being. I speak to you as to a friend, the one man to whom I can open my soul. I love Natasha, that

is so, but sometimes she seems to me wonderfully vulgar, and then I don't know what to think, I can't account for my loving her or, anyway, having loved her.

TCHEBUTYKIN (*gets up*). I am going away to-morrow, my boy, perhaps we shall never meet again, so this is my advice to you. Put on your cap, you know, take your stick and walk off . . . walk off and just go, go without looking back. And the further you go, the better (*a pause*). But do as you like! It doesn't matter. . . .

(SOLYONY *crosses the stage in the background with two officers; seeing* TCHEBUTYKIN *he turns towards him; the officers walk on.*)

SOLYONY. Doctor, it's time! It's half-past twelve (*greets* ANDREY).

TCHEBUTYKIN. Directly. I am sick of you all. (*To* ANDREY) If anyone asks for me, Andryusha, say I'll be back directly . . . (*sighs*). Oho-ho-ho!

SOLYONY. He had not time to say alack before the bear was on his back (*walks away with the doctor*). Why are you croaking, old chap?

TCHEBUTYKIN. Come!

SOLYONY. How do you feel?

TCHEBUTYKIN (*angrily*). Like a pig in clover.

SOLYONY. The old chap need not excite himself. I won't do anything much, I'll only shoot him like a snipe (*takes out scent and sprinkles his hands*). I've used a whole bottle to-day, and still they smell. My hands smell like a corpse (*a pause*). Yes. . . . Do you remember the poem? "And, restless, seeks the stormy ocean, as though in tempest there were peace." . . .

TCHEBUTYKIN. Yes. He had not time to say alack before the bear was on his back (*goes out with* SOLYONY. *Shouts are heard: "Halloo! Oo-oo!"* ANDREY *and* FERAPONT *come in*).

FERAPONT. Papers for you to sign. . . .

ANDREY (*nervously*). Let me alone! Let me alone! I entreat you! (*walks away with the perambulator*).

FERAPONT. That's what the papers are for—to be signed (*retires into the background*).

(*Enter* IRINA *and* TUSENBACH *wearing a straw hat;* KULIGIN *crosses the stage shouting "Aa-oo, Masha, aa-oo!"*)

TUSENBACH. I believe that's the only man in the town who is glad that the officers are going away.

IRINA. That's very natural (*a pause*). Our town will be empty now.

TUSENBACH. Dear, I'll be back directly.

IRINA. Where are you going?

TUSENBACH. I must go into the town, and then . . . to see my comrades off.

IRINA. That's not true. . . . Nikolay, why are you so absent-minded to-day? (*a pause*). What happened yesterday near the theatre?

TUSENBACH (*with a gesture of impatience*). I'll be here in an hour and with you again (*kisses her hands*). My beautiful one . . . (*looks into her face*). For five years now I have loved you and still I can't get used to it, and you seem to me more and more lovely. What wonderful, exquisite hair! What eyes! I shall carry you off to-morrow, we will work, we will be rich, my dreams

will come true. You shall be happy. There is only one thing, one thing: you don't love me!

IRINA. That's not in my power! I'll be your wife and be faithful and obedient, but there is no love, I can't help it (*weeps*). I've never been in love in my life! Oh, I have so dreamed of love, I've been dreaming of it for years, day and night, but my soul is like a wonderful piano of which the key has been lost (*a pause*). You look uneasy.

TUSENBACH. I have not slept all night. There has never been anything in my life so dreadful that it could frighten me, and only that lost key frets at my heart and won't let me sleep. . . . Say something to me . . . (*a pause*). Say something to me. . . .

IRINA. What? What am I to say to you? What?

TUSENBACH. Anything.

IRINA. There, there! (*a pause*).

TUSENBACH. What trifles, what little things suddenly *à propos* of nothing acquire importance in life! One laughs at them as before, thinks them nonsense, but still one goes on and feels that one has not the power to stop. Don't let us talk about it! I am happy. I feel as though I were seeing these pines, these maples, these birch-trees for the first time in my life, and they all seem to be looking at me with curiosity and waiting. What beautiful trees, and, really, how beautiful life ought to be under them! (*A shout of "Halloo! Aa-oo!"*). I must be off; it's time. . . . See, that tree is dead, but it waves in the wind with the others. And so it seems to me that if I die I shall

still have part in life, one way or another. Goodbye, my darling . . . (*kisses her hands*). Those papers of yours you gave me are lying under the calendar on my table.

IRINA. I am coming with you.

TUSENBACH (*in alarm*). No, no! (*goes off quickly, stops in the avenue*). Irina!

IRINA. What is it?

TUSENBACH (*not knowing what to say*). I didn't have any coffee this morning. Ask them to make me some (*goes out quickly*).

(IRINA *stands lost in thought, then walks away into the background of the scene and sits down on the swing. Enter* ANDREY *with the perambulator, and* FERAPONT *comes into sight.*)

FERAPONT. Andrey Sergeyevitch, the papers aren't mine; they are Government papers. I didn't invent them.

ANDREY. Oh, where is it all gone? What has become of my past, when I was young, gay, and clever, when my dreams and thoughts were exquisite, when my present and my past were lighted up by hope? Why on the very threshold of life do we become dull, grey, uninteresting, lazy, indifferent, useless, unhappy? . . . Our town has been going on for two hundred years—there are a hundred thousand people living in it; and there is not one who is not like the rest, not one saint in the past, or the present, not one man of learning, not one artist, not one man in the least remarkable who could inspire envy or a passionate desire to imitate him. . . . They only eat, drink, sleep, and then die . .

others are born, and they also eat and drink and sleep, and not to be bored to stupefaction they vary their lives by nasty gossip, vodka, cards, litigation; and the wives deceive their husbands, and the husbands tell lies and pretend that they see and hear nothing, and an overwhelmingly vulgar influence weighs upon the children, and the divine spark is quenched in them and they become the same sort of pitiful, dead creatures, all exactly alike, as their fathers and mothers . . . (*To* FERAPONT, *angrily*) What do you want?

FERAPONT. Eh? There are papers to sign.

ANDREY. You bother me!

FERAPONT (*handing him the papers*). The porter from the local treasury was saying just now that there was as much as two hundred degrees of frost in Petersburg this winter.

ANDREY. The present is hateful, but when I think of the future, it is so nice! I feel so light-hearted, so free. A light dawns in the distance, I see freedom. I see how I and my children will become free from sloth, from kvass, from goose and cabbage, from sleeping after dinner, from mean, parasitic living. . . .

FERAPONT. He says that two thousand people were frozen to death. The people were terrified. It was either in Petersburg or Moscow, I don't remember.

ANDREY (*in a rush of tender feeling*). My dear sisters, my wonderful sisters! (*through tears*). Masha, my sister!

NATASHA (*in the window*). Who is talking so loud out there? Is that you, Andryusha? You

will wake baby Sophie. *Il ne faut pas faire de bruit, la Sophie est dormée déjà. Vous êtes un ours* (*getting angry*). If you want to talk, give the perambulator with the baby to somebody else. Ferapont, take the perambulator from the master!

FERAPONT. Yes, ma'am (*takes the pram*).

ANDREY (*in confusion*). I am talking quietly.

NATASHA (*petting her child, inside the room*). Bobik! Naughty Bobik! Little rascal!

ANDREY (*looking through the papers*). Very well, I'll look through them and sign what wants signing, and then you can take them back to the Board . . . (*goes into the house reading the papers;* FERAPONT *pushes the pram farther into the garden*).

NATASHA (*speaking indoors*). Bobik, what is mamma's name? Darling, darling! And who is this? This is auntie Olya. Say to auntie, "Good morning, Olya!"

(*Two wandering musicians, a man and a girl, enter and play a violin and a harp; from the house enter* VERSHININ *with* OLGA *and* ANFISA, *and stand for a minute listening in silence;* IRINA *comes up.*)

OLGA. Our garden is like a public passage; they walk and ride through. Nurse, give those people something.

ANFISA (*gives money to the musicians*). Go away, and God bless you, my dear souls! (*the musicians bow and go away*). Poor things. People don't play if they have plenty to eat. (*To* IRINA) Good morning, Irisha! (*kisses her*). Aye, aye, my little girl, I am having a time of it! Living in

the high-school, in a government flat, with dear Olya—that's what the Lord has vouchsafed me in my old age! I have never lived so well in my life, sinful woman that I am. . . . It's a big flat, and I have a room to myself and a bedstead. All at the government expense. I wake up in the night and, O Lord, Mother of God, there is no one in the world happier than I!

VERSHININ (*looks at his watch*). We are just going, Olga Sergeyevna. It's time to be off (*a pause*). I wish you everything, everything. . . . Where is Marya Sergeyevna?

IRINA. She is somewhere in the garden. . . . I'll go and look for her.

VERSHININ. Please be so good. I am in a hurry.

ANFISA. I'll go and look for her too. (*Shouts*) Mashenka, aa-oo! (*goes with* IRINA *into the farther part of the garden*). Aa-oo! Aa-oo!

VERSHININ. Everything comes to an end. Here we are parting (*looks at his watch*). The town has given us something like a lunch; we have been drinking champagne, the mayor made a speech. I ate and listened, but my heart was here, with you all . . . (*looks round the garden*). I've grown used to you. . . .

OLGA. Shall we ever see each other again?

VERSHININ. Most likely not (*a pause*). My wife and two little girls will stay here for another two months; please, if anything happens, if they need anything . . .

OLGA. Yes, yes, of course. Set your mind at rest (*a pause*). By to-morrow there won't be a soldier in the town—it will all turn into a memory,

and of course for us it will be like beginning a new life . . . (*a pause*). Nothing turns out as we would have it. I did not want to be a head-mistress, and yet I am. It seems we are not to live in Moscow. . . .

VERSHININ. Well. . . . Thank you for everything. . . . Forgive me if anything was amiss. . . . I have talked a great deal: forgive me for that too—don't remember evil against me.

OLGA (*wipes her eyes*). Why doesn't Masha come?

VERSHININ. What else am I to say to you at parting? What am I to theorise about? . . . (*laughs*). Life is hard. It seems to many of us blank and hopeless; but yet we must admit that it goes on getting clearer and easier, and it looks as though the time were not far off when it will be full of happiness (*looks at his watch*). It's time for me to go! In old days men were absorbed in wars, filling all their existence with marches, raids, victories, but now all that is a thing of the past, leaving behind it a great void which there is so far nothing to fill: humanity is searching for it passionately, and of course will find it. Ah, if only it could be quickly! (*a pause*). If, don't you know, industry were united with culture and culture with industry. . . . (*Looks at his watch*) But, I say, it's time for me to go. . . .

OLGA. Here she comes.

(MASHA *comes in.*)

VERSHININ. I have come to say good-bye. . . .

(OLGA *moves a little away to leave them free to say good-bye.*)

MASHA (*looking into his face*). Good-bye . . . (*a prolonged kiss*).

OLGA. Come, come. . . .

(MASHA *sobs violently.*)

VERSHININ. Write to me. . . . Don't forget me! Let me go! . . . . Time is up! . . . Olga Sergeyevna, take her, I must . . . go . . . I am late . . . (*much moved, kisses* OLGA'S *hands; then again embraces* MASHA *and quickly goes off*).

OLGA. Come, Masha! Leave off, darling.

(*Enter* KULIGIN.)

KULIGIN (*embarrassed*). Never mind, let her cry—let her. . . . My good Masha, my dear Masha! . . . You are my wife, and I am happy, anyway. . . . I don't complain; I don't say a word of blame. . . . Here Olya is my witness. . . . We'll begin the old life again, and I won't say one word, not a hint. . . .

MASHA (*restraining her sobs*). By the sea-strand an oak-tree green. . . . Upon that oak a chain of gold. . . . Upon that oak a chain of gold. . . . I am going mad. . . . By the sea-strand . . . an oak-tree green. . . .

OLGA. Calm yourself, Masha. . . . Calm yourself. . . . Give her some water.

MASHA. I am not crying now. . . .

KULIGIN. She is not crying now . . . she is good. . . .

(*The dim sound of a far-away shot.*)

MASHA. By the sea-strand an oak-tree green, upon that oak a chain of gold. . . . The cat is green. . . . the oak is green. . . . I am mixing it up . . . (*drinks water*). My life is a failure. . . .

I want nothing now. . . . I shall be calm directly. . . . It doesn't matter. . . . What does "strand" mean? Why do these words haunt me? My thoughts are in a tangle.

(*Enter* IRINA.)

OLGA. Calm yourself, Masha. Come, that's a good girl. Let us go indoors.

MASHA (*angrily*). I am not going in. Let me alone! (*sobs, but at once checks herself*). I don't go into that house now and I won't.

IRINA. Let us sit together, even if we don't say anything. I am going away to-morrow, you know . . . (*a pause*).

KULIGIN. I took a false beard and moustache from a boy in the third form yesterday, just look . . . (*puts on the beard and moustache*). I look like the German teacher . . . (*laughs*). Don't I? Funny creatures, those boys.

MASHA. You really do look like the German teacher.

OLGA (*laughs*). Yes.

(MASHA *weeps*.)

IRINA. There, Masha!

KULIGIN. Awfully like. . . .

(*Enter* NATASHA.)

NATASHA (*to the maid*). What? Mr. Protopopov will sit with Sophie, and let Andrey Sergeyitch wheel Bobik up and down. What a lot there is to do with children . . . (*To* IRINA) Irina, you are going away to-morrow, what a pity. Do stay just another week (*seeing* KULIGIN *utters a shriek; the latter laughs and takes off the beard and moustache*). Well, what next, you gave me such

a fright! (*To* IRINA) I am used to you and do you suppose that I don't feel parting with you? I shall put Andrey with his violin into your room—let him saw away there!—and we will put baby Sophie in his room. Adorable, delightful baby! Isn't she a child! To-day she looked at me with such eyes and said "Mamma"!

KULIGIN. A fine child, that's true.

NATASHA. So to-morrow I shall be all alone here (*sighs*). First of all I shall have this avenue of fir-trees cut down, and then that maple. . . . It looks so ugly in the evening. . . . (*To* IRINA) My dear, that sash does not suit you at all. . . . It's in bad taste. You want something light. And then I shall have flowers, flowers planted everywhere, and there will be such a scent. . . . (*Severely*) Why is there a fork lying about on that seat? (*Going into the house, to the maid*) Why is there a fork lying about on this seat, I ask you? (*Shouts*) Hold your tongue!

KULIGIN. She is at it!

(*Behind the scenes the band plays a march; they all listen.*)

OLGA. They are going.

(*Enter* TCHEBUTYKIN.)

MASHA. Our people are going. Well . . . a happy journey to them! (*To her husband*) We must go home. . . . Where are my hat and cape?

KULIGIN. I took them into the house . . . I'll get them directly. . . .

OLGA. Yes, now we can go home, it's time.

TCHEBUTYKIN. Olga Sergeyevna!

OLGA. What is it? (*a pause*) What?

TCHEBUTYKIN. Nothing. . . . I don't know how to tell you (*whispers in her ear*).

OLGA (*in alarm*). It can't be!

TCHEBUTYKIN. Yes . . . such a business. . . . I am so worried and worn out, I don't want to say another word . . . (*with vexation*). But there, it doesn't matter!

MASHA. What has happened?

OLGA (*puts her arms round* IRINA). This is a terrible day. . . . I don't know how to tell you, my precious. . . .

IRINA. What is it? Tell me quickly, what is it? For God's sake! (*cries*).

TCHEBUTYKIN. The baron has just been killed in a duel.

IRINA (*weeping quietly*). I knew, I knew. . . .

TCHEBUTYKIN (*in the background of the scene sits down on a garden seat*). I am worn out . . . (*takes a newspaper out of his pocket*). Let them cry. . . . (*Sings softly*). "Tarara-boom-dee-ay" . . . It doesn't matter.

(*The three sisters stand with their arms round one another.*)

MASHA. Oh, listen to that band! They are going away from us; one has gone altogether, gone forever. We are left alone to begin our life over again. . . . We've got to live . . . we've got to live. . . .

IRINA (*lays her head on* OLGA'S *bosom*). A time will come when everyone will know what all this is for, why there is this misery; there will be no mysteries and, meanwhile, we have got to live . . . we have got to work, only to work! To-morrow

I shall go alone; I shall teach in the school, and I will give all my life to those to whom it may be of use. Now it's autumn; soon winter will come and cover us with snow, and I will work, I will work.

OLGA (*embraces both her sisters*). The music is so gay, so confident, and one longs for life! O my God! Time will pass, and we shall go away for ever, and we shall be forgotten, our faces will be forgotten, our voices, and how many there were of us; but our sufferings will pass into joy for those who will live after us, happiness and peace will be established upon earth, and they will remember kindly and bless those who have lived before. Oh, dear sisters, our life is not ended yet. We shall live! The music is so gay, so joyful, and it seems as though a little more and we shall know what we are living for, why we are suffering. . . . If we only knew—if we only knew!

(*The music grows more and more subdued;* KULIGIN, *cheerful and smiling, brings the hat and cape;* ANDREY *pushes the perambulator in which Bobik is sitting.*)

TCHEBUTYKIN (*humming softly*). "Tarara-boom-dee-ay!" (*reads his paper*). It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter.

OLGA. If we only knew, if we only knew!

CURTAIN.

IVANOV

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

First performed at Moscow,
November 20, 1887

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

NIKOLAY ALEXEYEVITCH IVANOV (*permanent member of the Rural Board*).
ANNA PETROVNA (*his wife, before her baptism and marriage called* SARRA ABRAMSON).
COUNT MATVEY SEMYONITCH SHABELSKY (*his maternal uncle*).
PAVEL KIRILLITCH LEBEDYEV (*Chairman of the District Zemstvo*).
ZINAIDA SAVISHNA (*his wife*).
SASHA (*their daughter, aged twenty*).
YEVGENY KONSTANTINOVITCH LVOV (*a young Zemstvo Doctor*).
MARFA YEGOROVNA BABAKIN (*the young widow of a landowner, daughter of a rich merchant*).
DMITRI NIKITITCH KOSSIH (*Excise officer*).
MIHAIL MIHAILOVITCH BORKIN (*a distant relative of* IVANOV *and Steward of his estate*).
AVDOTYA NAZAROVNA (*an old woman of no definite occupation*).
YEGORUSHKA (*a dependant of the* LEBEDYEVS).
FIRST GUEST. SECOND GUEST.
THIRD GUEST. FOURTH GUEST.
PYOTR (IVANOV'S *manservant*).
GAVRIL (LEBEDYEV'S *manservant*).
VISITORS (*of both sexes*). MENSERVANTS.

The action takes place in one of the provinces of Central Russia.

ACT I

The garden on IVANOV'S *estate. On the left, the front of the house with the verandah. One window is open. In front of the verandah is a wide semicircular space, from which an avenue at right angles to the house, and another to the right, run into the garden. On the right side of the verandah are garden seats and tables. On one of the latter a lamp is burning. Evening is coming on. As the curtain rises there is the sound of a duet of piano and 'cello being practised indoors.*

IVANOV *is sitting at a table reading.* BORKIN, *wearing high boots and carrying a gun, comes into sight at the further end of the garden—he is a little drunk; seeing* IVANOV, *he advances on tiptoe towards him, and when he reaches him aims his gun at his face.*

IVANOV (*seeing* BORKIN, *starts and jumps up*). Misha, what are you about? . . . You gave me a fright. . . . I am worried as it is, and then you come with your stupid jokes . . . (*sits down*). He has frightened me, and is delighted . . .

BORKIN (*laughs*). There, there. . . . I am sorry, I am sorry (*sits down beside him*). I won't do it again, I really won't . . . (*takes off his cap*). I'm

hot. Would you believe it, my dear soul, I've done nearly twelve miles in three hours! . . . Just feel how my heart is beating! . . .

IVANOV (*reading*). All right, presently. . . .

BORKIN. No, feel now (*takes* IVANOV'S *hand and lays it on his chest*). Do you hear? Too-too-too-too-too-too. . . . It shows I've got heart-disease, you know. I might die suddenly, any minute. I say, will you be sorry if I die?

IVANOV. I am reading . . . presently. . . .

BORKIN. No, seriously, will you be sorry if I die? Nikolay Alexeyevitch, will you be sorry if I die?

IVANOV. Don't pester me!

BORKIN. My dear fellow, do tell me whether you will be sorry.

IVANOV. I am sorry you smell of vodka. Misha, it's disgusting!

BORKIN (*laughs*). Do I smell of it? How surprising! . . . Though there is nothing surprising in it, really. At Plesniki I met the examining magistrate, and I must own we put away eight glasses or so each. Drinking is very bad for one, really. I say, it is bad for one, isn't it? It is, isn't it?

IVANOV. This is really intolerable. . . . You must see that it's simply maddening. . . .

BORKIN. There, there. . . . I am sorry, I am sorry. . . . God bless you; sit still . . . (*gets up and walks away*). Queer people; there's no talking to them! (*Comes back*) Oh yes, I was almost forgetting. . . . Give me the eighty-two roubles.

IVANOV. What eighty-two roubles?

BORKIN. To pay the labourers to-morrow.

IVANOV. I haven't got it.

BORKIN. Very much obliged! (*Mimicking*) I haven't got it. . . . But the labourers must be paid, mustn't they?

IVANOV. I don't know. I haven't the money to-day. Wait till the first of next month, when I get my salary.

BORKIN. Much good it is talking to such a specimen! . . . The labourers won't come for the money on the first; they will come to-morrow morning! . . .

IVANOV. Well, what am I to do? You may cut my throat, hack me to pieces. . . . And what a revolting habit it is of yours to pester me just when I am reading or writing, or . . .

BORKIN. I ask you, must the labourers be paid or not? But what's the use of talking to you! (*waves his hand*). And he is a country gentleman—hang it all, a landowner! . . . Up-to-date agricultural methods. . . . Three thousand acres, and not a penny in his pocket! . . . There is a wine-cellar, and no corkscrew. . . . I'll go and sell the three horses to-morrow! Yes! I have sold the standing oats, and now I'll sell the rye! (*strides about the stage*). Do you suppose I'd hesitate? Eh? No; you've hit on the wrong man for that. . . .

(SHABELSKY'S *voice inside: "It is impossible to play with you. . . . You have no more ear than a stuffed pike, and your touch is appalling!"*)

ANNA PETROVNA (*appears at the open window*).

Who was talking here just now? Was it you, Misha? Why are you striding about like that?

BORKIN. Your *Nicolas-voilà* is enough to drive one to anything!

ANNA PETROVNA. I say, Misha, tell them to bring some hay on to the croquet lawn.

BORKIN (*waving her off*). Please let me alone. . . .

ANNA PETROVNA. Goodness! what a way to speak! . . . That tone doesn't suit you at all. If you want women to like you, you must never let them see you cross or standing on your dignity. (*To her husband*) Nikolay, let us roll about on the hay!

IVANOV. It's bad for you to stand at an open window, Anyuta. Please go in . . . (*Calls*) Uncle, shut the window. (*The window is shut.*)

BORKIN. Don't forget that in two days' time you have to pay Lebedyev his interest.

IVANOV. I remember. I shall be at Lebedyev's to-day, and I will ask him to wait (*looks at his watch*).

BORKIN. When are you going?

IVANOV. Directly.

BORKIN (*eagerly*). Wait a minute! I do believe it is Sasha's birthday to-day . . . tut—tut—tut . . . and I forgot it. . . . What a memory! (*skips about*). I am going—I am going (*sings*). I am going. . . . I'll go and have a bathe, chew some paper, take three drops of spirits of ammonia—and I shall be ready to begin all over again. . . . Nikolay Alexeyevitch darling, my precious, angel of my heart, you are always in a state of nerves, complaining, and in the dismal doldrums, and yet

the devil only knows what we two might bring off together! I am ready to do anything for you. . . . Would you like me to marry Marfusha Babakin for you? Half her dowry shall be yours . . . no, not half, all, all shall be yours!

IVANOV. Do shut up with your silly rot.

BORKIN. No, seriously! Would you like me to marry Marfusha? We'll go halves over the dowry. . . . But there, why do I talk about it to you? As though you would understand! (*Mimicking*) "Shut up with your silly rot." You are a fine man, an intelligent man, but you've none of that streak in you, you know—none of that go . . . To have a fling to make the devils sick with envy. . . . You are a neurotic, a drooper, but if you were a normal man you would have a million in a year. For instance, if I had at this moment two thousand three hundred roubles, I would have twenty thousand in a fortnight. You don't believe it? You call that silly rot too? No, it's not silly rot. . . . There, give me two thousand three hundred roubles and in a week I'll bring you twenty thousand. On the other side of the river Ovsyanov is selling a strip of land just opposite us for two thousand three hundred roubles. If we were to buy that strip, both sides of the river would be ours, and if both banks were ours, you know, we should have the right to dam up the river, shouldn't we? We'd set about building a mill, and, as soon as we let people know we were going to make a dam, all the people living down the river would make a hullaballoo, and we'd say—*kommen sie hier*, if you don't want to

have a dam, buy us off. Do you understand? Zarevsky's factory would give us five thousand, Korolkov three thousand, the monastery five thousand. . . .

IVANOV. That's all stuff and nonsense, Misha. . . . If you don't want to quarrel with me, keep such schemes to yourself.

BORKIN (*sits down to the table*). Of course! . . . I knew it would be so! . . . You won't do anything yourself, and you won't let me.

(*Enter* SHABELSKY *and* LVOV.)

SHABELSKY (*coming out of the house with* LVOV). Doctors are just the same as lawyers; the only difference is that the lawyers rob you, and the doctors rob you and murder you. . . . I am not speaking of present company (*sits down on the garden-seat*). Charlatans, exploiters. . . . Perhaps in Arcadia there may be some exceptions to the general rule, but . . . In the course of my life I've spent twenty thousand or so on doctors, and I never met a single one who did not seem to me a licensed swindler.

BORKIN (*to* IVANOV). Yes, you do nothing yourself, and you won't let me do anything. That's why we have no money. . . .

SHABELSKY. I repeat that I am not speaking of present company. . . . Perhaps there are exceptions, though indeed . . . (*yawns*).

IVANOV (*shutting his book*). What do you say, doctor?

LVOV (*looking round towards the window*). What I said to you this morning: she must go to the Crimea at once (*paces about the stage*).

SHABELSKY (*giggles*). Crimea! . . . Why don't you and I go in for being doctors, Misha? It's so simple. . . . As soon as some Madame Angot or Ophelia begins wheezing and coughing because she has nothing better to do, you've to take a sheet of paper and prescribe according to the rules of your science: first, a young doctor, then a trip to the Crimea, a Tatar guide in the Crimea. . . .

IVANOV (*to* SHABELSKY). Oh, do stop it! How you do keep on! (*To* LVOV) To go to the Crimea one must have money. Even if I do manage to get it, she absolutely refuses to go.

LVOV. Yes, she does (*a pause*).

BORKIN. I say, doctor, is Anna Petrovna really so ill that it is necessary for her to go to the Crimea?

LVOV (*looking round towards the window*). Yes, it's consumption.

BORKIN. Ss—ss! . . . That's bad. . . . For some time past I've thought she looked as though she wouldn't last long.

LVOV. But . . . don't talk so loud . . . you will be heard in the house (*a pause*).

BORKIN (*sighing*). Such is life. . . . The life of man is like a flower growing luxuriantly in a field: a goat comes and eats it, and the flower is no more.

SHABELSKY. It's all nonsense, nonsense, nonsense . . . (*yawns*). Nonsense and fraud (*a pause*).

BORKIN. And here, gentlemen, I keep showing Nikolay Alexeyevitch how to make money. I've just given him a glorious idea, but as usual he throws cold water on it. There's no moving him.

. . . Just look at him: melancholy, spleen. depression, hypochondria, dejection. . . .

SHABELSKY (*stands up and stretches*). You've got some scheme for everyone, you genius; you teach everyone how to live, you might try it on me for once. . . . Give me a lesson, you brainy person, show me a way of escape. . . .

BORKIN (*getting up*). I'm going to bathe. . . . Good-bye, gentlemen. (*To the* COUNT) There are twenty things you could do. . . . If I were in your place I would have twenty thousand within a week (*is going*).

SHABELSKY (*follows him*). How's that? Come, show me how to do it.

BORKIN. It doesn't need showing. It's very simple (*coming back*). Nikolay Alexeyevitch, give me a rouble!

(IVANOV *gives him the money in silence.*)

BORKIN. *Merci!* (*To the* COUNT) You've still lots of trump cards in your hand.

SHABELSKY (*following him*). Well, what are they?

BORKIN. If I were in your place, within a week I would have thirty thousand, if not more (*goes out with the* COUNT).

IVANOV (*after a pause*). Superfluous people, superfluous words, the necessity of answering foolish questions—all this has so exhausted me that I am quite ill, doctor. I have grown irritable, hasty, harsh, and so petty that I don't know myself. For days together my head aches; I cannot sleep, there's a noise in my ears. . . And there's no getting away from it all . . . simply nothing I can do. . . .

LVOV. I want to talk to you seriously, Nikolay Alexeyevitch.

IVANOV. What is it ?

LVOV. It's about Anna Petrovna (*sits down*). She won't consent to go to the Crimea, but with you she would go.

IVANOV (*pondering*). To go together we must have the means to do it. Besides, they won't give me a long leave. I've taken my holiday this year already . . .

LVOV. Well, supposing that is so. Now for the next point. The most important condition for the treatment of consumption is absolute peace of mind, and your wife never has a moment's peace of mind. She is in continual agitation over your attitude to her. Forgive me, I am excited and am going to speak frankly to you. Your conduct is killing her (*a pause*). Nikolay Alexeyevitch, allow me to think better of you !

IVANOV. It's all true, quite true. . . . I expect I am terribly to blame, but my thoughts are in a tangle, my soul is paralysed by inertia, and I am incapable of understanding myself. I don't understand others or myself . . . (*looks at the window*). We may be overheard, let us go for a stroll. (*They get up.*) I'd tell you the whole story from the beginning, my dear fellow, but it's a long story and so complicated that I shouldn't be finished by to-morrow morning. (*They are walking away*) Anyuta is a remarkable, exceptional woman. . . . For my sake she has changed her religion, given up her father and mother, abandoned wealth, and if I wanted a hundred more sacrifices she would

make them without the quiver of an eyelash. Well, and I am in no way remarkable, and I have made no sacrifices. But it's a long story. . . . The point of it all is, dear doctor (*hesitates*), is that . . . The long and the short of it is that I was passionately in love when I married and vowed I would love her for ever; but . . . five years have passed, she still loves me, and I . . . (*makes a gesture of despair*). Here you tell me that she is soon going to die, and I feel neither love nor pity, but a sort of emptiness and weariness. . . . If one looks at me from outside it must be horrible. I don't myself understand what is happening in my soul. (*They go out along the avenue.*)

(*Enter* SHABELSKY.)

SHABELSKY (*laughing*). Upon my honour, he is no common rascal, he is a genius, an expert! We ought to put up a statue to him. He combines in himself every form of modern rottenness: the lawyer's and the doctor's, and the huckster's and the cashier's (*sits down on the lowest step of the verandah*). And yet I believe he has never finished his studies! That's what is so surprising. . . . What a rascal of genius he would have been if he had absorbed culture and learning! "You can have twenty thousand in a week," says he. "You've still the ace of trumps in your hands," says he, "your title" (*laughs*). "Any girl with a dowry would marry you. . . ."

(ANNA PETROVNA *opens the window and looks down.*)

SHABELSKY. "Would you like me to make a

match for you with Marfusha ? " says he. *Qui est-ce que c'est Marfusha ?* Ah, it's that Balabalkin . . . Babakalkin . . . who looks like a washer-woman. . . .

ANNA PETROVNA. Is that you, Count ?

SHABELSKY. What is it ?

(ANNA PETROVNA *laughs.*)

SHABELSKY (*with a Jewish accent*). Vot for you laugh ?

ANNA PETROVNA. I thought of something you said. Do you remember you said at dinner : " A thief that is forgiven, a horse . . ." What is it ?

SHABELSKY. A Jew that is christened, a thief that is forgiven, a horse that is doctored—are worth the same price.

ANNA PETROVNA (*laughs*). You can't make even a simple joke without spite in it. You are a spiteful man. (*Earnestly*) Joking apart, Count, you are very spiteful. It's dull and dreadful living with you. You are always snarling and grumbling. You think all men are scoundrels and rascals. Tell me honestly, have you ever said anything good about anyone ?

SHABELSKY. Why this cross-examination ?

ANNA PETROVNA. We've been living under the same roof for five years and I've never once heard you speak of people calmly, without malice and derision. What harm have people done you ? And do you really imagine that you are better than anyone else ?

SHABELSKY. I don't imagine it at all. I am just as great a blackguard and pig in a skull-cap as everyone else, *mauvais ton* and an old rag.

I always abuse myself. Who am I? What am I? I was rich, free and rather happy, but now . . . I am a dependant, a hanger-on, a degraded buffoon. I am indignant, I am contemptuous, and people laugh at me: I laugh and they shake their heads at me mournfully and say the old chap is cracked . . . and most often they don't hear me, don't heed me. . . .

ANNA PETROVNA (*calmly*). It is screeching again.

SHABELSKY. Who is screeching?

ANNA PETROVNA. The owl. It screeches every evening.

SHABELSKY. Let it screech. Nothing can be worse than what is now (*stretching*). Ah, my dear Sarra, if I were to win a hundred or two hundred thousand I'd show you a thing or two! You'd see no more of me here. I'd get away from this hole, away from the bread of charity . . . and wouldn't set foot here again till the day of judgment. . . .

ANNA PETROVNA. And what would you do if you did win a lot of money?

SHABELSKY (*after a moment's thought*). First of all I would go to Moscow to hear the gypsies. Then . . . then I should be off to Paris. I should take a flat there, I should go to the Russian church. . . .

ANNA PETROVNA. And what else?

SHABELSKY. I should sit for days together on my wife's grave and think. I should sit there till I died. My wife is buried in Paris. . . . (*a pause*).

ANNA PETROVNA. How awfully dull it is! Shall we play another duet?

SHABELSKY. Very well, get the music ready. (ANNA PETROVNA *goes out. Enter* IVANOV *and* LVOV.)

IVANOV (*comes into sight with* LVOV *in the avenue*). You took your degree only last year, my dear friend, you are still young and vigorous while I am five and thirty. I have the right to advise you. Don't marry a Jewess nor a neurotic nor a blue stocking, but choose what is commonplace, grey, with no vivid colours or superfluous flourishes. In fact, build your whole life on the conventional pattern. The greyer and the more monotonous the background the better, my dear boy. Don't fight with thousands single-handed, don't wage war on windmills, don't batter your head against the wall. . . . God preserve you from all sorts of scientific farming, wonderful schools, enthusiastic speeches. . . . Shut yourself up in your shell, do the humble duty God has laid upon you. . . . That's snugger, happier and more honest. But the life that I have led, how tiring it is! Ah, how tiring! . . . How many mistakes, how much that was unjust and absurd. . . . (*Seeing the* COUNT, *irritably*) You are always in the way, Uncle, you never let one have a talk in peace!

SHABELSKY (*in a tearful voice*). Oh, the devil take me, there's no refuge for me anywhere! (*jumps up and goes into the house*).

IVANOV (*calls after him*). Oh, I am sorry! (*To* LVOV) What made me hurt his feelings? Yes, I must be out of gear. I must do something with myself, I really must. . . .

LVOV (*in agitation*). Nikolay Alexeyevitch,

I have listened to you and . . . and forgive me, I will speak plainly, without beating about the bush. Your voice, your intonation, to say nothing of your words, are full of such soulless egoism, such cold heartlessness. . . . Someone very near to you is dying through her love for you, her days are numbered, and you . . . you can be cold to her, can walk about and give advice, and pose. . . . I cannot tell you, I have no gift for words, but . . . but you are intensely repulsive to me!

IVANOV. Very likely, very likely. . . . You can see it all more clearly from outside. . . . It's very possible that you understand. . . . I daresay I am horribly to blame, horribly . . . (*listens*). I fancy I hear the carriage. I am going to get ready . . . (*goes to the house and stops*). You dislike me, doctor, and don't conceal your dislike. It does credit to your heart . . . (*goes into the house*).

LVOV (*alone*). My cursed weakness! Again I've missed the chance and haven't said what I ought to have said. . . . I cannot speak to him calmly! As soon as I open my mouth and say a word I feel such a suffocation, such a heaving here (*points to his chest*), and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. I hate this Tartuffe, this highflown scoundrel, I hate him. . . . Here he is going away. . . . His poor wife's only happiness is to have him near her, she lives in him, she implores him to spend one evening with her, and he . . . he cannot! He feels stifled and cramped at home, if you please. If he were to spend a

single evening at home, he'd be so depressed that he'd blow his brains out. Poor fellow . . . he must have freedom to contrive some new villainy. . . . Oh, I know why you go to these Lebedyevs every evening! I know!

(*Enter* IVANOV *in his hat and overcoat,* ANNA PETROVNA *and* SHABELSKY.)

SHABELSKY (*as he comes out of the house with* ANNA PETROVNA *and* IVANOV). Really, *Nicolas,* this is positively inhuman! You go out every evening and we are left alone. We are so bored we go to bed at eight o'clock. It's hideous, it's not life at all! And why is it that you can go and we mayn't? Why?

ANNA PETROVNA. Leave him alone! Let him go, let him. . . .

IVANOV (*to his wife*). How can you go when you are ill? You are ill and you mustn't be out after sunset. . . . Ask the doctor. You are not a child, Anyuta, you must be sensible. . . . (*To the* COUNT) And what do you want to go there for?

SHABELSKY. I'd go to hell, into the jaws of a crocodile, so long as I need not stay here! I am bored! I am bored to stupefaction! Everybody is sick of me. You leave me at home so that she should not be bored alone, but I do nothing but snap and nag at her!

ANNA PETROVNA. Leave him alone, Count, leave him alone! Let him go if he enjoys it.

IVANOV. Anyuta, why do you speak like that? You know I am not going for pleasure! I have to speak about the loan.

ANNA PETROVNA. I don't know why you justify yourself! Go! No one is keeping you!

IVANOV. Come, don't let us nag at each other! Surely it isn't necessary?

SHABELSKY (*in a tearful voice*). *Nicolas*, dear boy, I implore you, take me with you! I shall have a look at the knaves and fools there and perhaps it will amuse me! I haven't been anywhere since Easter!

IVANOV (*irritably*). Oh, very well, come along! How sick I am of you all!

SHABELSKY. Yes? Oh, *merci, merci . . .* (*cheerfully takes him by the arm and leads him aside*). May I wear your straw hat?

IVANOV. Yes, only make haste!

(*The* COUNT *runs indoors.*)

IVANOV. How sick I am of you all! But, good God, what am I saying? Anyuta, I talk to you in an unpardonable way. I never used to be like this before. Well, good-bye, Anyuta, I shall be back by one.

ANNA PETROVNA. Kolya, darling, stay at home!

IVANOV (*agitated*). My precious, my poor unhappy darling, I entreat you, don't prevent my going out in the evening. It's cruel and unfair of me, but let me be unfair! I feel miserably depressed at home! As soon as the sun sets, I am overcome by acute misery. Such misery! Don't ask why it is. I don't know myself. I swear I don't! Here it is misery; I go to the Lebedyevs and there it is worse still; I come back and here misery again, and it goes on like that all night. . . . It's simply desperate!

ANNA PETROVNA. Kolya . . . but if you stay? We will talk as we used to. . . . We'll have supper together; we will read. . . . The old grumbler and I have learned a lot of duets for you . . . (*puts her arms round him*). Do stay! (*a pause*). I don't understand you. This has been going on for a whole year. Why have you changed?

IVANOV. I don't know, I don't know. . . .

ANNA PETROVNA. And why don't you want me to go with you in the evening?

IVANOV. If you will have it, I'll tell you. It's rather cruel to say it, but it is better to speak out. . . . When I am depressed I . . . I begin not to love you. I run away even from you at such times. In short, I must get away from home.

ANNA PETROVNA. Depression! I understand—I understand. . . . Do you know what, Kolya? Try to sing, to laugh, to get cross, as you used to. . . . Stay, we will laugh, drink home-made wine, and we'll drive away your depression in an instant. Shall I sing to you? Or we'll go and sit in your study in the dark as we used to, and you shall tell me about your depression. . . . Your eyes are so full of suffering! I will look into them and weep, and we shall both feel better . . . (*she laughs and cries*). Or, Kolya, what is it? The flowers come again every spring, but joys do not? Yes? Well, go, go. . . .

IVANOV. Pray for me, Anyuta! (*he moves forward, stops, and ponders*). No, I cannot (*goes out*).

ANNA PETROVNA. Go . . . (*sits down at the table*).

Lvov (*pacing up and down the stage*). Anna Petrovna, you must make it a rule as soon as the clock strikes six to come indoors and stay there till morning. The damp of the evening is bad for you.

Anna Petrovna. Yes, sir!

Lvov. What do you mean by that? I am speaking seriously.

Anna Petrovna. And I don't want to be serious (*coughs*).

Lvov. There, you see, you are coughing already.

(*Enter* Shabelsky).

Shabelsky (*comes out in a hat and overcoat*). Where is Nikolay? Is the carriage there? (*goes up quickly and kisses* Anna Petrovna's *hand*). Good-night, my charmer! (*grimacing*). *Gewalt!* Vill you pardon me? (*goes out quickly*).

Lvov. The buffoon!

(*A pause; the sound of a concertina far away.*)

Anna Petrovna. How dull it is! The coachmen and the cooks have got up a ball, while I . . . I seem to be forsaken. . . . Yevgeny Konstantinitch, why are you striding up and down? Come here, sit down!

Lvov. I can't sit still (*a pause*).

Anna Petrovna. They are playing the *Greenfinch* in the kitchen.

(*Sings*) Greenfinch, greenfinch, where have you been?
Drinking vodka under the hill?

(*A pause.*) Doctor, have you got a father and mother?

Lvov. My father is dead, but I have a mother.

ANNA PETROVNA. Do you miss your mother?

LVOV. I have no time to miss her.

ANNA PETROVNA (*laughs*). The flowers come again every spring, but joys do not. Who was it said that to me? Let me see. . . . I believe it was Nikolay himself (*listens*). There's the owl screeching again!

LVOV. Well, let it screech.

ANNA PETROVNA. I begin to think, doctor, that fate has been unfair to me. Numbers of people who are perhaps no better than I are happy and pay nothing for their happiness. I have paid for everything, absolutely everything! And what a price! Why take from me such terribly high interest? . . . My good friend, you are all on your guard with me—you are so considerate, you are afraid to tell me the truth; but do you suppose I don't know what's the matter with me? I know very well. But it's boring to talk about it. (*In a Jewish accent*) Vill you pardon me, please? Can you tell funny stories?

LVOV. No.

ANNA PETROVNA. Nikolay can. And I begin to be surprised at people's injustice. Why don't they return love for love, and why do they repay truth with falsehood? Tell me, how long will my father and mother hate me? They live forty miles from here, but day and night, even in my sleep, I feel their hatred. And what would you have me make of Nikolay's depression? He says that he doesn't love me only in the evenings, when he is overwhelmed with depression. That I understand and can allow for. But only imagine

if he should tire of me altogether! Of course it's impossible, but—if he did? No, no, I must not even think about it. (*Sings*) Greenfinch, greenfinch, where have you been? . . . (*starts*). What dreadful ideas come into my mind! You are not married, doctor, and there are many things you can't understand. . . .

Lvov. You are surprised . . . (*sits down beside her*). No, I . . . I am surprised—I am surprised at you! Come, explain, make me understand, how is it that you, intelligent, honest, almost a saint, have allowed yourself to be so shamelessly deceived and dragged into this owl's nest? Why are you here? What have you in common with this cold, soulless . . . but let us leave your husband out! What have you in common with these vulgar, empty surroundings? Oh, good heavens! . . . that everlastingly grumbling, rusty, mad Count, that knave Misha—a scoundrel if ever there was one—with his revolting countenance. . . . Explain to me what you are here for. How did you come here?

Anna Petrovna (*laughs*). That's just how he used once to talk. Word for word. . . . But his eyes are larger, and when he began talking of anything with excitement they glowed like coals. . . . Go on, go on!

Lvov (*gets up with a wave of his hand*). What am I to say? Go indoors!

Anna Petrovna. You say that Nikolay is this and that, one thing and another. How do you know him? Do you suppose that you can get to know a man in six months? He is a remarkable

man, doctor, and I am sorry that you did not meet him two or three years ago. Now he is depressed and melancholy, he doesn't talk or do anything; but in the old days . . . how charming he was! I loved him at first sight (*laughs*). I looked and the mousetrap went bang! He said "Come" . . . I cut off everything as, you know, one cuts off dead leaves with scissors, and followed him (*a pause*). But now it is different. Now he goes to the Lebedyevs to distract his mind with other women, while I . . . sit in the garden and listen to the owl screeching . . . (*A watchman's tap.*) And have you any brothers, doctor?

LVOV. No.

(ANNA PETROVNA *breaks into sobs.*)

LVOV. Well, what now? What's the matter?

ANNA PETROVNA (*gets up*). I can't bear it, doctor . . . I am going. . . .

LVOV. Where?

ANNA PETROVNA. Where he is . . . I am going. Tell them to put the horses in (*runs into the house*).

LVOV. No, I must absolutely decline to treat a patient under such conditions! It's not enough that they don't pay me a farthing, but they turn my soul inside out as well! . . . No, I decline! It's too much . . . (*goes into the house*).

CURTAIN.

ACT II

A drawing-room in LEBEDYEV'S *house; facing the stage a door into the garden; doors on right and left. Old-fashioned expensive furniture. A chandelier, candelabras, and pictures—all under covers.*

ZINAIDA SAVISHNA, KOSSIH, AVDOTYA NAZAROVNA, YEGORUSHKA, GAVRIL, *a* MAIDSERVANT, OLD LADY VISITORS, YOUNG PEOPLE, *and* MADAME BABAKIN.

ZINAIDA SAVISHNA *is sitting on the sofa.* OLD LADIES *are sitting in arm-chairs on either side of her, and* YOUNG PEOPLE *on ordinary chairs. In the background, near the way out into the garden, they are playing cards; among the players are* KOSSIH, AVDOTYA NAZAROVNA *and* YEGORUSHKA. GAVRIL *is standing by the door on right; a* MAIDSERVANT *carries round a tray full of sweets. Throughout the act* GUESTS *pass across the stage from the garden to door on right and back again.* MADAME BABAKIN *comes in from door on right and goes up to* ZINAIDA SAVISHNA.

ZINAIDA (*joyfully*). My darling Marfa Yegorovna!

MADAME BABAKIN. How are you, Zinaida

Savishna? I have the honour to congratulate you on your daughter's birthday. (*They kiss.*) God grant that . . .

ZINAIDA. Thank you, darling, I am so glad. . . . Well, how are you?

MADAME BABAKIN. Thank you very much indeed (*sits down beside her on the sofa*). How do you do, young people?

(*The* GUESTS *get up and bow.*)

FIRST GUEST (*laughs*). Young people! . . . Why, are you old, then?

MADAME BABAKIN (*with a sigh*). Well, I am sure I don't claim to be young. . . .

FIRST GUEST (*laughing respectfully*). Upon my word, what next! You don't look like a widow; you can give points to any young girl.

(GAVRIL *hands* MADAME BABAKIN *tea.*)

ZINAIDA (*to* GAVRIL). Why do you bring it like that? Fetch some jam. Gooseberry or something.

MADAME BABAKIN. Please don't trouble. Thanks ever so much. . . .

(*A pause.*)

FIRST GUEST. Did you drive through Mushkino, Marfa Yegorovna?

MADAME BABAKIN. No, through Zaimishtche. The road is better that way.

FIRST GUEST. To be sure.

KOSSIH. Two spades.

YEGORUSHKA. Pass.

AVDOTYA. Pass.

SECOND GUEST. Pass.

MADAME BABAKIN. Lottery tickets have gone

up shockingly, Zinaida Savishna, darling. It's unheard of: the first drawings are worth two hundred and seventy and the second nearly two hundred and fifty. It has never been so much before. . . .

ZINAIDA (*sighs*). It's a good thing for those who have plenty of them.

MADAME BABAKIN. Don't say that, darling. Though the price is so high, it does not pay to put one's money into them. The insurance alone is enough to drive you crazy.

ZINAIDA. That may be so; but still, my dear, one has hopes . . . (*she sighs*). God is merciful.

THIRD GUEST. From my point of view, *mesdames*, I maintain that it does not pay to have capital at all nowadays. Investments yield a very small dividend and to put money into business is extremely risky. The way I look at it, *mesdames*, is that the man who has capital in the present day is in a much more critical position than a man who . . .

MADAME BABAKIN (*sighing*). That's true!

(FIRST GUEST *yawns*.)

MADAME BABAKIN. Is that the way to behave before ladies?

FIRST GUEST. Pardon, *mesdames*, it was an accident.

(ZINAIDA SAVISHNA *gets up and goes out at the door on right. Prolonged silence.*)

YEGORUSHKA. Two of diamonds.

AVDOTYA. Pass.

SECOND GUEST. Pass.

KOSSIH. Pass.

MADAME BABAKIN (*aside*). O Lord, how deadly dull it is!

(*Enter* ZINAIDA SAVISHNA *and* LEBEDYEV.)

ZINAIDA (*coming out of door on right with* LEBEDYEV, *quietly*). What do you want to stick there for all alone! As though you were a prima-donna! Sit with your visitors (*sits down in the same place as before*).

LEBEDYEV (*yawns*). Oh dear, oh dear! (*Seeing* MADAME BABAKIN) Saints alive, here is strawberry cream! Turkish delight! (*shakes hands*). How is your precious self?

MADAME BABAKIN. All right, thanks ever so much.

LEBEDYEV. Well, thank God for that! (*sits down*). Yes, yes. . . . Gavril!

(GAVRIL *brings him a wineglass of vodka and a tumbler of water; he drinks up the vodka and sips the water.*)

FIRST GUEST. To your very good health!

LEBEDYEV. Very good health indeed! . . . I must be thankful I've not snuffed it altogether. (*To his wife*) Zyuzushka, where is the queen of the day?

KOSSIH (*plaintively*). I should like to know why it is we have taken no tricks (*jumps up*). Why have we lost every game? May the devil flay me entirely!

AVDOTYA (*jumps up and says angrily*). Why, because if you can't play, my good man, you had better not take a hand. Whatever business had you to lead your opponent's suit? That's why you were left with your ace in pickle! (*They both run forward from the table.*)

KOSSIH (*in a tearful voice*). Listen. . . . I had the ace, king, queen and eight more diamonds, the ace of spades and one little heart, you know. . . . And she could not declare a little slam—the devil knows why! I said no trumps . . .

AVDOTYA. It was I who said no trumps! You said two and no trumps. . . .

KOSSIH. It's revolting! . . . Excuse me . . . you had . . . I had . . . you had . . . (*To* LEBEDYEV) Just think, Pavel Kirillitch . . . I had the ace, king, queen and eight more diamonds. . . .

LEBEDYEV (*putting his fingers in his ears*). Let me alone, if you don't mind . . .

AVDOTYA (*shouts*). It was I said no trumps!

KOSSIH (*ferociously*). May I be damned and disgraced if I ever sit down again to play with that cross old crab! (*goes quickly into the garden.* SECOND GUEST *goes after him.* YEGORUSHKA *is left at the table*).

AVDOTYA. Ugh! I am hot all over. . . . A crab! . . . You are a crab yourself!

MADAME BABAKIN. You are a hasty one, too, Granny. . . .

AVDOTYA (*seeing* MADAME BABAKIN, *flings up her hands*). My joy, my beauty! She is here, and me so blind as not to see her! . . . My darling . . . (*kisses her on the shoulder and sits down beside her*). How delightful! Let me have a look at you, my white swan! . . . I'll knock on the wood!

LEBEDYEV. Now you are off. . . . You'd much better be finding her a husband. . . .

AVDOTYA. I will find her one! I won't lay my

sinful old bones in my coffin till I have married her off, and Sasha too! . . . I won't! . . . (*a sigh*). Only where are they to be found nowadays, these husbands? Here they sit ruffling up their feathers like cocks in the rain, our young men!

THIRD GUEST. A very unhappy comparison. In my opinion, *mesdames*, if young men nowadays prefer a bachelor existence, the reason is to be found in social conditions, so to say. . . .

LEBEDYEV. Come, come, no moralising! . . . I don't care for it . . .

(*Enter* SASHA.)

SASHA (*goes up to her father*). Such glorious weather, and you all sit here in this stuffy room.

ZINAIDA. Sashenka, don't you see that Marfa Yegorovna is here?

SASHA. I am sorry (*goes up to* MADAME BABAKIN *and shakes hands*).

MADAME BABAKIN. You are growing proud, Sasha. You have not been to see me once (*kisses her*). I congratulate you, darling. . . .

SASHA. Thank you (*sits down beside her father*).

LEBEDYEV. Yes, Avdotya Nazarovna, it is a difficult job with the young men nowadays. One can't get a decent best man for a wedding, let alone a husband. Nowadays young people (no offence to present company) are so limp and flabby, God help them! . . . They can't talk, they can't dance, they can't drink. . . .

AVDOTYA. Oh, they are all equal to drinking if they have the chance.

LEBEDYEV. There's no great art in drinking—even a horse can drink. . . . The thing is to

drink like a gentleman. In our time we used to be struggling all day with lectures, and as soon as evening came on we would go off anywhere and be twirling like a top till morning . . . and we danced and amused the young ladies and had a good drink too. We talked nonsense or talked philosophy till our tongues were tired. . . . But the young men nowadays . . . (*waves his hand*). I can't make them out. . . . Neither a candle to God nor a poker to the devil. There's only one sensible fellow in the district, and he is married (*sighs*), and I fancy he is beginning to go off his head too. . . .

MADAME BABAKIN. Who is that?

LEBEDYEV. Nikolasha Ivanov.

MADAME BABAKIN. Yes, he is a nice gentleman (*makes a grimace*). Only unfortunate! . . .

ZINAIDA. How could he be fortunate, my dear? (*sighs*). What a mistake he made, poor fellow! He married his Jewess and reckoned, poor fellow! that her father and mother would give mountains of gold with her; but it has turned out quite the other way. . . . Ever since she changed her religion her father and mother have cast her off—they cursed her. . . . So he hasn't got a farthing. Now he is sorry, but it is too late. . . .

SASHA. Mother, that's not true.

MADAME BABAKIN (*hotly*). Sasha! not true? Why, everybody knows it. If it weren't for money why ever should he have married a Jewess? There are plenty of Russian girls, aren't there? He made a mistake, darling, he made a mistake . . . (*Eagerly*) And, I say, how she catches it

from him now! It is simply too funny. As soon as he comes home he is at her at once: "Your father and mother have cheated me! Get out of my house!" And where is she to go? Her father and mother won't take her; she would go for a housemaid, but she has never been trained to do anything . . . And he goes on from one thing to another till the Count takes her part. If it were not for the Count he would have been the death of her long ago. . . .

AVDOTYA. And sometimes he will shut her in the cellar and make her eat garlic. . . . She will eat it and eat it till she is sick (*laughter*).

SASHA. Father, that's a lie, you know!

LEBEDYEV. Well, what of it? Let them babble as they like . . . (*Shouts*) Gavril!

(GAVRIL *hands him vodka and water.*)

ZINAIDA. That's how it is he has come to ruin, poor fellow! His affairs are in a bad way, my dear. . . . If Borkin did not look after the estate he and his Jewess would have nothing to eat (*sighs*). And what we have had to put up with on his account, my dear. . . . God only knows what we have had to put up with! Would you believe it, dear, he has been owing us nine thousand for these three years!

MADAME BABAKIN (*with horror*). Nine thousand!

ZINAIDA. Yes. . . . It was my precious Pashenka's idea to give it to him. He never knows whom one can lend to and whom one can't. I say nothing of the capital—it's no good worrying about that—but he might at least pay the interest regularly.

SASHA (*hotly*). Mother, you have talked of that thousands of times already!

ZINAIDA. What is it to you? Why do you defend him?

SASHA (*getting up*). But how can you have the face to talk like that about a man who has done you no sort of harm? Why, what has he done to you?

THIRD GUEST. Alexandra Pavlovna, allow me to say a couple of words. I respect Nikolay Alexeyevitch, and always considered it an honour . . . but, speaking *entre nous*, my opinion is that he is an adventurer.

SASHA. Well, I congratulate you on your opinion.

THIRD GUEST. In support of it I beg to mention the following fact which was reported to me by his *attaché* or, so to speak, *cicerone*, Borkin. Two years ago at the time of the cattle plague he bought cattle, insured them . . .

ZINAIDA. Yes, yes, yes! I remember the incident. I was told of it too.

THIRD GUEST. Insured them—mark that—then infected them with the cattle plague and got the insurance money.

SASHA. Ugh, that's all such rubbish! No one bought cattle or infected them! That was all Borkin's invention, and he boasted of the plan everywhere. When Ivanov heard of it, Borkin was begging his pardon for a fortnight before he would forgive him. Ivanov is only to blame for being weak and not having the heart to kick that Borkin out, and he is to blame for putting too

much trust in people too! He has been robbed and plundered on all sides: everyone who could made money out of his generous schemes.

LEBEDYEV. Sasha, you little spitfire, shut up!

SASHA. Why do they talk such nonsense? It's so dull—so boring! Ivanov, Ivanov, Ivanov—you talk of nothing else (*goes to the door and turns back*). I wonder! (*to the young men*). I positively wonder at your patience, gentlemen! Aren't you tired of sitting still like this? The very air is heavy with boredom! Do say something; entertain the young ladies; move about a little! Come, if you have no other subject but Ivanov, laugh, sing, dance or something. . . .

LEBEDYEV (*laughing*). Give it to them, give it to them well!

SASHA. Come, I say, do something for me! If you don't care to dance, to laugh, to sing, if all that bores you, I beg you, I entreat you, just for once in your life—as a curiosity—to surprise or amuse us: make a great effort and all together think of something witty and brilliant; say something, even if it is rude or vulgar, so long as it is amusing and new! Or all together do some little thing, however inconspicuous, so long as it is just conceivably worth doing, so that for once in their lives the young ladies may cry "Oh!" as they look at you. You do want to please, don't you? So why don't you try to be pleasing? Ah! my friends, you are not up to much—not up to much, any of you. . . . The very flies die of boredom and the lamps begin smoking when they look at you. . . . You are not up to much, any of you

. . . I have told you so a thousand times already, and I shall always say so.

(*Enter* IVANOV *and* SHABELSKY.)

SHABELSKY (*entering with* IVANOV *by door on right*). Who is preaching here? You, Sasha? (*laughs and shakes hands with her*). Happy returns, my angel. God grant that you die as late as possible and are not born again. . . .

ZINAIDA (*dclightedly*). Nikolay Alexeyevitch! Count!

LEBEDYEV. Bah! Whom do I see? . . . The Count! (*goes to meet him*).

SHABELSKY (*seeing* ZINAIDA SAVISHNA *and* MADAME BABAKIN, *stretches out his hands to them*). Two gold mines on one sofa! . . . Delightful spectacle! (*shakes hands. To* ZINAIDA SAVISHNA) How do you do, Zyuzushka! (*To* MADAME BABAKIN) How do you do, dumpling!

ZINAIDA. I am glad. You are such a rare visitor, Count! (*Shouts*) Gavril, tea! Please sit down (*gets up, goes out of door on right and at once returns; she looks extremely preoccupied.* SASHA *sits down in the same place as before.* IVANOV *greets everyone in silence*).

LEBEDYEV (*to* SHABELSKY). Where have you dropped from? What brought you here? It is a surprise! (*kisses him*). Count, you are a rascal! Is that the way for decent people to behave? (*leads him by the hand to the footlights*). Why do you never come and see us? Are you cross, or what?

SHABELSKY. How can I come and see you? Astride a stick? I have no horses, and Nikolay

won't bring me with him : he tells me to stay with Sarra, to keep her company. Send your horses for me, and then I will come. . . .

LEBEDYEV (*with a wave of his hand*). Oh, well ! Zyuzushka would burst before she'd let me have the horses. You dear creature, you darling, you know you are nearer and dearer to me than anyone ! Of all the old set there is no one left but you and me ! In you I love my sorrows of past years, and my fair youth so idly flung away. . . . Joking apart, I feel ready to cry ! (*kisses the* COUNT).

SHABELSKY. Let go—let go ! You smell like a wine-cellar. . . .

LEBEDYEV. My dear soul, you can't think how I miss my old friends ! I could hang myself, I am so miserable (*softly*). Zyuzushka, with her money-grubbing, has driven all decent people away, and as you see we have none but Zulus left . . . these Dudkins and Budkins. . . . Come, drink your tea !

(GAVRIL *brings* SHABELSKY *tea.*)

ZINAIDA (*anxiously to* GAVRIL). What are you doing ? Bring some jam . . . gooseberry, or something . . .

SHABELSKY (*laughs ; to* IVANOV). There ; did I not tell you ? (*To* LEBEDYEV) I bet him on the way that as soon as we got here Zyuzushka would regale us with gooseberry jam. . . .

ZINAIDA. You are just as fond of your joke as ever, Count (*sits down*).

LEBEDYEV. She has made two barrels of gooseberry jam, so what is she to do with it ?

SHABELSKY (*sitting down near the table*). You are saving money, Zyuzushka, aren't you? I suppose you are a millionaire by now, eh?

ZINAIDA (*with a sigh*). Yes, to outsiders it seems as though we are richer than anyone, but where could we get money from? That's all gossip. . . .

SHABELSKY. Come, come! We know all about that! . . . We know what a poor hand you are at the game . . . (*To* LEBEDYEV) Pasha, tell the truth, have you saved a million?

LEBEDYEV. I don't know. Ask Zyuzushka. . . .

SHABELSKY (*to* MADAME BABAKIN). And our fat little dumpling will soon have a million too! She gets plumper and prettier, not every day, but every hour! That's what it is to have plenty of money. . . .

MADAME BABAKIN. I am very much obliged to your Excellency, but I am not fond of being jeered at.

SHABELSKY. My dear gold-mine, do you suppose it was a jeer? It was simply a cry from the heart. Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh. . . . There is no limit to my affection for you and Zyuzushka (*gaily*). It's rapture, ecstasy! I can't look at either of you unmoved!

ZINAIDA. You are just the same as ever. (*To* YEGORUSHKA) Yegorushka, put out the candles! Why let them burn for nothing when you are not playing? (YEGORUSHKA *starts; puts out the candles and sits down. To* IVANOV) Nikolay Alexeyevitch, how is your wife?

IVANOV. She is very ill. The doctor told us to-day that it is certainly consumption.

ZINAIDA. Really? What a pity! (*a sigh*). We are all so fond of her.

SHABELSKY. Nonsense, nonsense, nonsense! . . . There is no consumption at all: it's all quackery—doctors' tricks. The learned gentleman likes to hang about the house, so he makes out it's consumption. Luckily for him the husband is not jealous. (IVANOV *makes a gesture of impatience.*) As for Sarra herself, I don't trust a word she says or a thing she does. All my life I've never trusted doctors, lawyers, or women. It's all nonsense and nonsense, quackery and tricks!

LEBEDYEV (*to* SHABELSKY). You are a strange individual, Matvey! . . . You've taken up this affectation of misanthropy and play about with it like a fool with a new hat. You are a man like anyone else, but you are as peevish in your talk as though you had a blister on your tongue, or indigestion. . . .

SHABELSKY. Why, would you have me kiss rogues and scoundrels, or what?

LEBEDYEV. Where do you see rogues and scoundrels?

SHABELSKY. I don't refer to present company, of course, but . . .

LEBEDYEV. There you are with your buts. . . . It's all affectation.

SHABELSKY. Affectation? . . . It's a good thing you've no philosophy of life.

LEBEDYEV. What philosophy could I have? I sit every minute expecting to kick the bucket. That's my philosophy of life. It's too late for you and me, old man, to talk of philosophies of life. Yes, indeed! (*Shouts*) Gavril!

SHABELSKY. You have had too much of Gavril as it is. . . . Your nose is like beetroot already.

LEBEDYEV (*drinks*). Never mind, my dear soul . . . it's not my wedding day.

ZINAIDA. It is a long while since Dr. Lvov has been to see us. He has quite deserted us.

SASHA. My pet aversion. The walking image of honesty. He can't ask for a glass of water or smoke a cigarette without displaying his extraordinary honesty. If he walks about or talks, his face is always labelled "I am an honest man." He bores me.

SHABELSKY. He is a stiff-necked, narrow-minded individual! (*Mimicking*) "Make way for honest labour!" He shouts like a cockatoo at every step, and he fancies he is really a second Dobrolyubov. If a man does not shout as he does, he is a scoundrel. His views are wonderfully profound. If a peasant is well off and lives like a human being, he is a scoundrel and a blood-sucker. I put on a velvet jacket and am dressed by a valet, so I am a scoundrel and a slave-owner. He is simply bursting with honesty. Nothing is good enough for him. I am positively afraid of him. . . . Yes, indeed! any minute he may slap you in the face or call you a scoundrel from a sense of duty.

IVANOV. He wearies me dreadfully, but at the same time I like him; he is so sincere.

SHABELSKY. Nice sort of sincerity! He came up to me yesterday evening, and *apropos* of nothing at all: "You are deeply repulsive to me, Count!" I am very much obliged! And all that not

simply, but from principle: his voice shakes, his eyes flash, and he is all of a tremor. . . . Damnation take his wooden sincerity! He may find me hateful and disgusting; it's natural enough. . . . I can see that, but why tell me so to my face? I am a wretched creature, but anyway my hair is grey. . . . A stupid, pitiless honesty!

LEBEDYEV. Come, come, come! . . . You've been young yourself, and can make allowances.

SHABELSKY. Yes, I've been young and foolish: I've played the Tchatsky in my day. I've denounced rascals and blackguards, but never in my life have I called a man a thief to his face, or talked of the gallows in the house of a man who has been hanged. I was decently brought up. But your dull-witted doctor would be in the seventh heaven and feel that he was fulfilling his mission, if fate would grant him the opportunity of publicly slapping me in the face and punching me in the pit of the stomach for the sake of principle and the great ideals of humanity.

LEBEDYEV. Young people are always self-assertive. I had an uncle, a Hegelian . . . he would invite a houseful of visitors, drink with them, stand up on a chair like this and begin: "You are ignorant! You are the powers of darkness! The dawn of a new life," etc., etc., etc. . . . He would go on and on at them.

SASHA. And what did the visitors do?

LEBEDYEV. Oh, nothing . . . they just listened and went on drinking. Once, though, I challenged him to a duel . . . my own uncle. It was about Bacon. I remember, if I am right, I was

sitting where Matvey is now, and my uncle and Gerassim Nilitch were standing as it might be here, where Nikolay is. . . . And Gerassim Nilitch, if you please, puts the question . . .

(BORKIN, *foppishly dressed, with a parcel in his hand, comes in at door on right, humming and skipping about. A murmur of approval.*)

YOUNG LADIES. Mihail Mihailitch!

LEBEDYEV. Mihail Mihailitch! My ears tell me . . .

SHABELSKY. The soul of the party!

BORKIN. Here I am! (*runs up to* SASHA). Noble lady! I venture to make so bold as to congratulate the universe on the birth of so marvellous a flower as you. . . . As the tribute of my enthusiasm may I dare to offer you (*gives her the parcel*) some fireworks and Bengal fires of my own manufacture? May they illuminate the night as you lighten the gloom of the kingdom of darkness (*makes a theatrical bow*).

SASHA. Thank you. . . .

LEBEDYEV (*laughing, to* IVANOV). Why don't you get rid of that Judas?

BORKIN (*to* LEBEDYEV). My respects to Pavel Kirillitch! (*To* IVANOV) To my patron! (*Sings.*) *Nicolas, voilà, ho-hi-ho.* (*Makes the round of the whole party*) To the most honoured Zinaida Savishna! Divine Marfa Yegorovna . . . most ancient Avdotya Nazarovna . . . most illustrious Count. . . .

SHABELSKY (*laughs*). The soul of the party. . . . As soon as he comes in the atmosphere grows lighter. Have you noticed it?

BORKIN. Ough, I am tired. . . . I believe I have greeted everybody now. Well, what's the news, ladies and gentlemen? Is there nothing special to wake us up? (*Briskly to* ZINAIDA SAVISHNA) I say, mamma . . . as I was on the way here . . . (*To* GAVRIL) Give me some tea, Gavril, but no gooseberry jam! (*To* ZINAIDA SAVISHNA) As I was on the way here I saw the peasants stripping the bark of your osiers on the river. Why don't you let a dealer have them?

LEBEDYEV (*to* IVANOV). Why don't you get rid of that Judas?

ZINAIDA (*aghast*). I might, that's true, the idea never struck me!

BORKIN (*does drill exercises with his arms*). I can't get on without exercise. . . . What can I do that's extra special, mamma? Marfa Yegorovna, I *am* in form to-night . . . wild with excitement! (*Sings.*) "Once more I stand before thee. . . ."

ZINAIDA. Get up something, for we are all bored.

BORKIN. Really! Why are you all so down in the mouth? You sit like jurymen! . . . Let us do something. What would you like? Forfeits? Hide the ring? Touch third? Dancing? Fireworks?

YOUNG LADIES (*clap their hands*). Fireworks! Fireworks! (*they run into the garden*).

SASHA (*to* IVANOV). Why are you so depressed this evening?

IVANOV. My head aches, Sasha, and I am bored. . . .

SASHA. Come into the drawing-room. (*They go towards door on right ; everyone goes into the garden except* ZINAIDA SAVISHNA *and* LEBEDYEV.)

ZINAIDA. Well, that's something like a young man—before he has been here a minute he has cheered them all up (*turns down the big lamp*). While they are all out in the garden it is no use wasting the candles (*puts out the candles*).

LEBEDYEV (*following her*). Zyuzushka, we ought to give our visitors something to eat. . . .

ZINAIDA. There, what a lot of candles . . . no wonder people think we are rich (*puts out the candles*).

LEBEDYEV (*following her*). Zyuzushka, you ought to give the people something to eat. . . . They are young people, I bet they are hungry, poor things. . . . Zyuzushka. . . .

ZINAIDA. The Count has not finished his glass. Simply wasting sugar ! (*goes towards door on left*).

LEBEDYEV. Tfoo ! (*goes out into the garden*).

(*Enter* IVANOV *and* SASHA.)

SASHA (*comes in with* IVANOV *from door on right*). They have all gone into the garden.

IVANOV. That's how it is, Sasha. In old days I did a lot of work and a lot of thinking and never got tired ; now I do nothing and think of nothing, and I am weary body and soul. My conscience aches night and day, I feel that I am terribly to blame, but exactly in what way I am to blame I don't know. And then my wife's illness, no money, the everlasting nagging and gossip, unnecessary talk, that fool Borkin. . . . My home has grown hateful to me, and living in it is worse

than torture. I tell you openly, Sasha, even to be with my wife who loves me has become unbearable. You are my old friend, and won't be angry with me for speaking the truth. I have come to you to distract my mind, but I am bored here too, and I am longing to get home again. Forgive me, I will just slip away.

SASHA. Nikolay Alexeyevitch, I understand you. Your misfortune is that you are all alone. You ought to have someone by you whom you love and who understands you. Nothing can renew you but love.

IVANOV. What next, Sasha! That would be the last straw for a wretched bedraggled old creature like me to start a new love affair! God preserve me from such a calamity! No, my wise little friend, it is not a case for love affairs. I tell you in all solemnity, I can put up with everything —misery and neurasthenia and bankruptcy and the loss of my wife and my premature old age and my loneliness—but I cannot endure my contempt for myself. I could die with shame at the thought that I, a strong healthy man, have turned into a sort of Hamlet or a Manfred or a superfluous man . . . the devil knows what. There are pitiful creatures who are flattered at being called Hamlets or superfluous men, but to me it is a disgrace! It wounds my pride, I am crushed by shame, and I am miserable. . . .

SASHA (*jestingly through tears*). Nikolay Alexeyevitch, let us run off to America.

IVANOV. I am too lazy to move to this door, and you talk of America . . . (*They go to the door*

into the garden.) Of course, Sasha, you don't have an easy time of it here. When I look at the people that surround you, I feel horrified at the thought of whom you can marry. The only hope is that some lieutenant or student will pass this way and carry you off. . . .

(ZINAIDA SAVISHNA *comes in from door on left with a jar of jam.*)

IVANOV. Excuse me, Sasha, I will come after you. . . .

(SASHA *goes out into the garden.*)

IVANOV. Zinaida Savishna, I've come to ask you a favour.

ZINAIDA. What is it, Nikolay Alexeyevitch ?

IVANOV (*hesitates*). Well, you see, the fact is that the day after to-morrow the interest on your loan is due. You would very greatly oblige me if you would give me a little longer, or would let me add the interest on to the principal. I have no money at all at the moment. . . .

ZINAIDA (*alarmed*). Nikolay Alexeyevitch, how is that possible ? That's not the way to do things ! No, don't think of such a thing. For God's sake don't worry me, I have troubles enough. . . .

IVANOV. I am sorry, I am sorry . . . (*goes out into the garden*).

ZINAIDA. Ough, he has upset me ! I am all of a shake . . . all of a shake . . . (*goes out at door on right*).

(*Enter* KOSSIH.)

KOSSIH (*enters from left door and crosses the stage*). I had the ace, king, queen, and eight more diamonds, the ace of spades and just one . . . one

little heart, and she could not declare a little slam, the devil take her entirely. . . . (*goes out at door on right*).

(*Enter* AVDOTYA NAZAROVNA *and* FIRST GUEST.)

AVDOTYA (*coming from the garden with* FIRST GUEST). I could tear her to pieces, I could tear her to pieces, the old skinflint! It's no joke. I've been sitting here since five o'clock and she has not offered us as much as a stale herring! . . . It is a house! . . . It is a way to manage!

FIRST GUEST. I am so bored that I could run and bash my head against the wall! They are people, Lord have mercy upon us! One is so hungry and so bored; it's enough to make one howl like a wolf and begin snapping at people.

AVDOTYA. Couldn't I tear her to pieces, sinful woman that I am!

FIRST GUEST. I'll have a drink, old lady, and get home! I don't want your eligible young ladies. How the devil is one to think of love when one has not had one glass of wine since dinner?

AVDOTYA. Let's go and look for something. . . .

FIRST GUEST. Sh-sh! Quietly! I believe there is vodka in the sideboard in the dining-room. We'll get hold of Yegorushka. . . . Sh-sh! (*They go out by door on left.*)

(ANNA PETROVNA *and* LVOV *come out of door on right.*)

ANNA PETROVNA. It's all right, they will be pleased to see us. Nobody here. They must be in the garden.

LVOV. I wonder why you have brought me here into this nest of vultures? This is no place for

you or me. Honest people ought to keep out of this atmosphere!

ANNA PETROVNA. Listen, Mr. honest man! It is not polite to take a lady out and to talk to her of nothing but your honesty all the way! It may be honest, but to say the least of it, it is wearisome. You should never talk to women about your virtues. Let them see those for themselves. When my Nikolay was your age he did nothing but sing songs and tell stories in the company of ladies, but they could all see what sort of man he was.

LVOV. Oh, don't talk to me about your Nikolay. I understand him perfectly!

ANNA PETROVNA. You are a good man, but you don't understand anything. Let us go into the garden. He never used such expressions as "I am honest! I am stifled in this atmosphere! Vultures! Owl's nest! Crocodiles!" He used to leave the menagerie alone, and when he had been indignant all I heard from him was, "Ah, how unjust I was to-day!" or "Anyuta, I am sorry for that man!" That's what he was like, while you . . . (*They go out*).

(*Enter* AVDOTYA NAZAROVNA *and* FIRST GUEST.)

FIRST GUEST (*coming in from door on left*). It's not in the dining-room, so it must be somewhere in the larder. We must try Yegorushka. Let us go through the drawing-room.

AVDOTYA. Couldn't I tear her to pieces! (*They go out at door on right*).

(MADAME BABAKIN *and* BORKIN *run out of the garden, laughing;* SHABELSKY *comes trip-*

ping after them, laughing, and rubbing his hands.)

MADAME BABAKIN. How dull it is! (*laughs*). It is dull! They all sit and walk about as though they had swallowed a poker. I am stiff with boredom (*skips about*). I must stretch my legs! (BORKIN *puts his arm round her waist and kisses her on the cheek.*)

SHABELSKY (*laughs and snaps his fingers*). Dash it all! (*clears his throat*). After all . . .

MADAME BABAKIN. Let go, take away your arm, you shameless fellow, or goodness knows what the Count will think! Leave off! . . .

BORKIN. Angel of my soul, jewel of my heart! . . . (*kisses her*). Do lend me two thousand three hundred roubles! . . .

MADAME BABAKIN. N-no, n-no, n-no. . . . You may say what you like, but as regards money, no thank you. . . . No, no, no! Oh, take your arms away!

SHABELSKY (*prances round them*). The little dumpling. . . . She has her charm. . . .

BORKIN (*gravely*). Come, that's enough. Let us come to the point. Let us discuss things straightforwardly, in a businesslike way. Give me a direct answer, without any tricks or subtleties: yes or no? Listen (*points to the* COUNT). He wants money, at least three thousand roubles a year. You want a husband. Would you like to be a Countess?

SHABELSKY (*laughs*). A wonderful cynic!

BORKIN. Would you like to be a Countess? Yes or no?

MADAME BABAKIN (*agitated*). Do think what you are saying, Misha, really! And such things aren't done in this slap-dash way. . . . If the Count wishes it he can himself . . . and I don't know really how, all of a minute. . . .

BORKIN. Come, come, that's enough airs and graces! It's a business matter. . . . Yes or no?

SHABELSKY (*laughing and rubbing his hands*). Yes, really, eh? Dash it all, why not play this dirty trick? What? The dumpling! (*kisses* MADAME BABAKIN *on the cheek*). Charmer! Peach!

MADAME BABAKIN. Wait a minute, wait a minute. . . . You've quite upset me. . . . Go away, go away! No, don't go! . . .

BORKIN. Make haste! Yes or no? We've no time to waste. . . .

MADAME BABAKIN. I tell you what, Count. You come and stay with me for two or three days. . . . You'll find it jolly, it's not like this house. Come to-morrow. . . . (*To* BORKIN) No, you are joking, aren't you?

BORKIN (*angrily*). As though one would joke about serious things!

MADAME BABAKIN. Wait a minute, wait a minute. . . . Oh, I feel faint! I feel faint! Countess . . . I am fainting . . . I shall drop. . . . (BORKIN *and the* COUNT, *laughing, take her arm-in-arm and, kissing her on the cheek, lead her out by door on right.*)

(IVANOV *and* SASHA *run in from the garden.*)

IVANOV (*clutching his head in despair*). It cannot be! Don't, don't, Sasha! . . . Oh, don't!

SASHA (*carried away*). I love you madly. . . . There is no meaning in life, no joy, no happiness without you! You are everything to me! . . .

IVANOV. What's the use, what's the use? My God! I don't understand it! Sasha, don't! . . .

SASHA. In my childhood you were my only joy; I loved you and your soul like myself, but now . . . I love you, Nikolay Alexeyevitch! . . . I'll go with you to the ends of the earth, where you like, to the grave, if you will, but for God's sake let it be soon or I shall be stifled. . . .

IVANOV (*breaks into a happy laugh*). What is it? Beginning life again then, Sasha, yes? . . . My happiness! (*draws her to him*). My youth, my freshness! . . .

(ANNA PETROVNA *comes in from the garden and, seeing her husband and* SASHA, *stands rooted to the spot.*)

IVANOV. I am to live then? Yes? To get to work again? (*A kiss. After the kiss* IVANOV *and* SASHA *look round and see* ANNA PETROVNA.)

IVANOV (*in horror*). Sarra!

CURTAIN.

ACT III

IVANOV'S *study. A writing-table on which papers, books, official envelopes, knick-knacks and revolvers are lying in disorder; near the papers a lamp, a decanter of vodka, a plate of herring, pieces of bread and cucumber. On the walls maps, pictures, guns, pistols, sickles, whips, etc. It is midday.*

SHABELSKY, LEBEDYEV, BORKIN *and* PYOTR. SHABELSKY *and* LEBEDYEV *are sitting by the writing-table,* BORKIN *in the middle of the stage astride a chair.* PYOTR *is standing at the door.*

LEBEDYEV. The policy of France is clear and definite. . . . The French know what they want. All they want is to flay the sausage-eaters, while it is quite a different story with Germany. Germany has plenty of specks in her eye besides France. . . .

SHABELSKY. Nonsense! . . . What I think is that the Germans are cowards and the French are cowards too. They are simply putting out their tongues at each other on the sly. Believe me, things won't go further than that. They won't come to fighting.

BORKIN. And to my mind, there is no need to

fight. What is the use of all these armaments, congresses, expenditure? I tell you what I should do. I should collect dogs from all over the country, innoculate them with a good dose of Pasteur's virus and let them loose in the enemy's country. All the enemy would run mad with hydrophobia in a month.

LEBEDYEV (*laughs*). His head is small to look at, but there are as many great ideas in it as fish in the sea.

SHABELSKY. He is a specialist in them!

LEBEDYEV. God bless you, you do amuse me, Mihail Mihailovitch. (*Stops laughing*) We keep chattering away, but what about vodka? *Repetatur!* (*fills three wine-glasses*). To our good health! (*They drink and eat a little.*) Good old red herring is the best sort of snack one can have.

SHABELSKY. No, cucumber is better. . . . The learned men have been busy thinking since the creation of the world, but they have thought of nothing better than salted cucumber. (*To* PYOTR) Pyotr, go and get some more cucumbers and tell the cook to fry us four onion turnovers, and send them hot.

(PYOTR *goes out.*)

LEBEDYEV. Caviare is not bad with vodka either. But you want to use it properly. . . . You want to take a quarter of a pound of pressed caviare, two spring onions, olive oil, mix it all together . . . and just a little wee drop of lemon on the top of it, you know. Gorgeous! The very smell of it is stunning.

BORKIN. A dish of fried gudgeon is good after vodka too. Only one must know how to fry them. They must be cleaned, then dipped in sifted breadcrumbs and fried till they are dry, so that they crunch in the teeth. . . . Kroo-kroo-kroo. . . .

SHABELSKY. We had a good dish at Madame Babakin's yesterday—mushrooms.

LEBEDYEV. I daresay. . . .

SHABELSKY. Only it was prepared in some special way. You know, with onion and bay leaves and all sorts of condiments. As soon as the cover was taken off there was a steam, a smell . . . delicious!

LEBEDYEV. Well, what do you say? *Repetatur*, gentlemen. (*They drink.*) To our good health! (*Looks at his watch*) I am afraid I can't wait for Nikolay. It's time I was off. You say you had mushrooms at Madame Babakin's, and we have not seen a mushroom yet. And just tell me, if you please, why the devil are you so often at Marfa's?

SHABELSKY (*nods towards* BORKIN). Why, he wants to marry me to her.

LEBEDYEV. Marry? Why, how old are you?

SHABELSKY. Sixty-two.

LEBEDYEV. The very time to get married. And Marfa is just the match for you.

BORKIN. It is not a question of Marfa, but of Marfa's roubles.

LEBEDYEV. Anything else! Marfa's roubles! You will be crying for the moon next!

BORKIN. When the man is married and has

stuffed his pockets, you will see whether it's crying for the moon! You will envy his luck.

SHABELSKY. And you know he is in earnest. This genius is convinced that I'll do what he tells me and marry her.

BORKIN. Why, of course! Aren't you convinced of it too?

SHABELSKY. You are crazy. . . . When was I convinced? Phew!

BORKIN. Thank you. . . . Thank you very much! So you want to make a fool of me? First, it's I'll marry and then I won't marry. . . . Who the devil is to make you out? And I have given my word of honour! So you won't marry her?

SHABELSKY (*shrugging his shoulders*). He is in earnest! Amazing person!

BORKIN (*indignant*). In that case what do you want to upset a respectable woman for? She is mad on being a countess, can't sleep or eat. . . . Is it a subject to joke about? Is it honest?

SHABELSKY (*snapping his fingers*). Well, and how if I do play this dirty trick after all? What? Just for mischief? I'll go and do it! On my word. . . . It will be fun!

(*Enter* LVOV.)

LEBEDYEV. Doctor, our humble respects! (*gives* LVOV *his hand and sings*). Doctor, save me kindly, sir, I am in deadly fear of death!

LVOV. Nikolay Alexeyevitch has not come in yet?

LEBEDYEV. Why no, I have been waiting for

him for more than an hour. (Lvov *strides impatiently up and down the stage.*) Well, my dear fellow, how is Anna Petrovna?

Lvov. Very ill.

Lebedyev (*sighs*). Can I go and pay her my respects?

Lvov. No, please don't go. I believe she is asleep . . . (*a pause*).

Lebedyev. She is a nice, sweet woman (*sighs*). On Sasha's birthday, when she fainted at our house, I looked at her face and I saw she had not long to live, poor dear. I don't know why she was taken ill then. I ran up, I looked at her and she was lying pale as death, with Nikolay on his knees beside her as pale as she, and Sasha in tears. Sasha and I went about as though we were dazed for a week after.

Shabelsky (*to* Lvov). Tell me, honoured votary of science, what learned sage was it discovered that ladies with delicate chests are benefited by the frequent visits of a young doctor? It's a great discovery, great! To which is it to be ascribed: to the allopaths or the homeopaths?

(Lvov *is on the point of answering, but with a contemptuous gesture walks away.*)

Shabelsky. What a withering glance. . . .

Lebedyev. And what devil sets your tongue wagging? Why did you insult him?

Shabelsky (*irritably*). And what does he tell lies for? Consumption, no hope, she is dying. . . . It's all lies! I can't endure it!

Lebedyev. What makes you think he is lying?

Shabelsky (*gets up and walks about*). I can't

admit the idea that a living creature should suddenly, *à propos* of nothing, go and die. Let us drop the subject!

(*Enter* KOSSIH.)

KOSSIH (*runs in, breathless*). Is Nikolay Alexeyevitch at home? Good morning! (*rapidly shakes hands with everyone*). Is he at home?

BORKIN. No; he is out.

KOSSIH (*sits down and leaps up*). If that's so, good-bye! (*drinks a glass of vodka and hurriedly eats something*). I'll go on . . . I am busy . . . I am worn out . . . I can hardly stand up. . . .

LEBEDYEV. Where have you dropped from?

KOSSIH. From Barabanov's. . . . We were playing vint all night, and have only just finished. . . . I am cleaned out. . . . That Barabanov plays like a cobbler! (*In a weeping voice*) Just listen: all the time I was playing hearts. . . . (*Addresses* BORKIN, *who skips away from him*) He leads diamonds, but I play hearts again; he diamonds. . . . Well, I made no tricks. (*To* LEBEDYEV) We play four clubs. I had the ace, the queen, and five more clubs in my hand, the ace, the ten, and two more spades. . . .

LEBEDYEV (*putting his fingers in his ears*). Spare me, for mercy's sake, spare me!

KOSSIH (*to the Count*). Do you see: the ace, the queen, and five more clubs, the ace, the ten, and two more spades. . . .

SHABELSKY (*waving him off*). Go away; I don't want to hear you!

KOSSIH. And all at once such ill-luck: my ace of spades was trumped in the first round.

SHABELSKY (*picking up a revolver from the table*). Go away, I'll shoot! . . .

KOSSIH (*waves his hand*). Damnation take it. . . . Is there nobody one can say a word to? One might be in Australia: no common interests, no sympathy. . . . They are all absorbed in themselves. . . . I must go, though . . . it's time (*snatches up his cap*). Time is precious (*shakes hands with* LEBEDYEV). Pass! (*laughter*).

(KOSSIH *goes out, and in the doorway stumbles against* AVDOTYA NAZAROVNA.)

AVDOTYA (*screams*). Plague take you! Knocking me off my feet!

ALL. A-ah! she is everywhere at once!

AVDOTYA. So this is where they are, and I have been looking all over the house. Good morning! my bright falcons, enjoying your meal? (*greets them*).

LEBEDYEV. What have you come about?

AVDOTYA. Business, my good sir. (*To the Count*) Business that concerns you, your Excellency (*bows*). I was told to greet you and inquire after your health. . . . And my pretty poppet bid me say that if you don't come and see her this evening, she will cry her eyes out. Take him aside, my dear, she said, and whisper it into his ear in secret. But what's the need of secrets? We are old friends here. Besides, it's not as if we were robbing a hen-roost, but aiming at lawful wedlock with the love and mutual consent of both parties. Sinful woman that I am, I never touch a drop, but on such an occasion, I will have a glass!

LEBEDYEV. And I'll have one too (*fills the glasses*). And you, old crow, seem none the worse for wear. You were an old woman when I met you first, thirty years ago.

AVDOTYA. I've lost count of the years. . . . I've buried two husbands, and would marry a third, but no one cares to take me without a dowry. I had eight children . . . (*takes the glass*). Well, please God, we've begun a good work and God grant we finish it! They will live and prosper and we shall look at them and rejoice. God give them love and good counsel! (*drinks*). It's stiff vodka!

SHABELSKY (*laughing, to* LEBEDYEV). But what's the oddest thing of all, you know, is that they seriously think that I . . . It's amazing! (*gets up*). What do you think, Pasha—shall I really play this dirty trick? For mischief. . . . Why should not the old dog snap up his bone, Pasha, eh?

LEBEDYEV. You are talking nonsense, Count. It's time for you and me to think of kicking the bucket; the time for Marfas and roubles has passed long ago. . . . Our day is over.

SHABELSKY. No, I will do it—on my honour, I will!

(*Enter* IVANOV *and* LVOV.)

LVOV. I beg you to spare me only five minutes.

LEBEDYEV. Nikolasha! (*goes up to* IVANOV *and kisses him*). Good morning, my dear boy. I have been waiting for you for a good hour.

AVDOTYA (*bows*). Good morning, sir.

IVANOV (*bitterly*). Gentlemen, again you've

turned my study into a drinking bar! . . . A thousand times I have asked each and all of you not to do it . . . (*goes up to the table*). There, now . . . you've spilt vodka over my papers . . . here are crumbs and bits of cucumber. . . . It's disgusting!

LEBEDYEV. I am sorry, Nikolasha, I am sorry. . . . Forgive us. I want to talk to you, dear boy, about something very important. . . .

BORKIN. And I, too.

LVOV. Nikolay Alexeyevitch, can I have a word with you?

IVANOV (*pointing to* LEBEDYEV). You see he wants me too. Wait a little; you can come afterwards. . . . (*To* LEBEDYEV) What is it?

LEBEDYEV. Gentlemen, I want to have a confidential talk. Please. . . .

(*The* COUNT *goes out with* AVDOTYA NAZAROVNA, BORKIN *follows them, then* LVOV.)

IVANOV. Pasha, you may drink as much as you like—it's an illness with you; but I beg you not to lead Uncle into it. He never used to drink before. It's bad for him.

LEBEDYEV (*alarmed*). My dear, I did not know. . . . I did not even notice. . . .

IVANOV. If, which God forbid, the old baby should die, it wouldn't matter to you, but it would to me. . . . What is it you want? (*a pause*).

LEBEDYEV. You see, my dear friend. . . . I don't know how to begin to make it sound less shameless. . . . Nikolasha, I am ashamed, I blush, I can't bring myself to say it, but, my dear boy, put yourself in my position—realise that I

am a man in bondage, a nigger, a rag. . . . Forgive me. . . .

IVANOV. What is it?

LEBEDYEV. My wife has sent me. . . . Do me a favour—be a friend, pay her your interest! You wouldn't believe how she nags at me, drives me, wears me out! Do get rid of her, for goodness' sake! . . .

IVANOV. Pasha, you know I have no money just now.

LEBEDYEV. I know, I know; but what am I to do? She won't wait. If she summons you, how can Sasha and I ever look you in the face again?

IVANOV. I am ashamed myself, Pasha—I should like to sink into the earth; but . . . but where am I to get it? Tell me, where? The only thing is to wait till the autumn, when I sell the corn.

LEBEDYEV (*shouts*). She won't wait! (*a pause*).

IVANOV. Your position is unpleasant and difficult, and mine is worse still (*walks up and down thinking*). And there is no plan one can think of. . . . There's nothing to sell. . . .

LEBEDYEV. You might go to Milbach and ask him; he owes you sixteen thousand, you know.

(IVANOV *waves his hand hopelessly.*)

LEBEDYEV. I tell you what, Nikolasha. . . . I know you will begin scolding, but . . . do a favour to an old drunkard. Between friends. . . . Look upon me as a friend. . . . We have both been students, liberals. . . . We have common ideas and interests. . . . We both studied in Moscow. . . . *Alma mater* . . . (*takes out his*

pocket-book). Here I've got a secret hoard; no one at home knows of it. Let me lend it to you . . . (*takes out money and lays it on the table*). Drop your pride and look at it as a friend. . . . I would take it from you—on my honour, I would (*a pause*). Here it is, on the table, eleven hundred. You go to her to-day and give it with your own hands. . . . Take it, Zinaida Savishna, and may it choke you! Only mind you don't make a sign that it comes from me, God preserve you! or I shall get it hot from old Gooseberry Jam (*looks into* IVANOV'S *face*). Oh, all right, never mind! (*hastily takes the money from the table and puts it into his pocket*). Never mind! I was joking. . . . Forgive me, for Christ's sake! (*a pause*). You are sick at heart?

(IVANOV *makes a gesture of despair.*)

LEBEDYEV. Yes, it is a business . . . (*sighs*). A time of woe and tribulation has come for you. A man is like a samovar, old boy. It is not always in the cool on the shelf—there are times when they put hot coals into it. . . . The comparison is not worth much, but I can't think of anything better . . . (*sighs*). Troubles strengthen the spirit. I am not sorry for you, Nikolasha—you'll get out of your difficulties, things will come right; but I feel vexed and offended with people. . . . I should like to know where these scandals come from! There are such stories going about you all over the district that you might get a call from the public prosecutor any day. . . . You are a murderer and a blood-sucker and a robber. . . .

IVANOV. That doesn't matter; what does matter is that my head aches.

LEBEDYEV. That's all from thinking too much.

IVANOV. I don't think at all.

LEBEDYEV. You just snap your fingers at everything, Nikolasha, and come over to us. Sasha is fond of you; she understands you and appreciates you. She is a good, fine creature, Nikolasha. She takes neither after father nor mother, but after some passing stranger. . . . Sometimes I look at her and can't believe that a bottle-nosed old drunkard like me can have such a treasure. Come over; you can talk about intellectual subjects with her, and it will be a change for you. She has a faithful, sincere nature . . . (*a pause*).

IVANOV. Pasha, my dear soul, leave me alone.

LEBEDYEV. I understand, I understand . . . (*looks hurriedly at his watch*). I understand (*kisses* IVANOV). Good-bye. I've got to go to the dedication of a school (*goes to the door and stops*). She is a clever girl. . . . Yesterday she and I were talking about gossip (*laughs*). And she made an epigram: "Father," she said, "glow-worms shine at night simply so that the night birds may see and devour them more easily; and good people exist to provide food for gossip and slander." What do you say to that? A genius! A George Sand!

IVANOV. Pasha! (*stops him*). What is the matter with me?

LEBEDYEV. I wanted to ask you that myself, but, to tell you the truth, I did not like to. I

don't know, dear boy! On the one hand, it seemed to me that you were crushed by misfortunes of all sorts, and on the other hand, I know you are not the sort to . . . You are not the one to be mastered by trouble. There is something else in it, Nikolasha, but what it is I don't know.

IVANOV. I don't know myself. I fancy it is either . . . but no! (*a pause*). You see, what I meant to say was this. I had a workman called Semyon—you remember him. One day at threshing time he wanted to show the girls how strong he was, put two sacks of rye on his back, and ruptured himself. He died soon after. It seems to me that I have ruptured myself, too. The high-school, university, then managing my estate, plans, schools. . . . My beliefs were not like other people's, my marriage was not like other people's. I was enthusiastic, I took risks, threw away my money right and left, as you know. I have had more happiness and more misery than anyone in the whole district. All this was like those sacks for me, Pasha. . . . I took a burden on my back, and my back was broken. At twenty we are heroes—we tackle anything, we can do anything; and at thirty we are already exhausted and good for nothing. How do you explain that liability to exhaustion, tell me? But perhaps it's not that, though. . . . That's not it, that's not it! . . . Go along, Pasha, God bless you; I have been boring you.

LEBEDYEV (*eagerly*). You know what it is, old boy? It's your environment has destroyed you.

IVANOV. Oh, that's stupid, Pasha, and stale. Run along!

LEBEDYEV. Yes, it is certainly stupid. I can see for myself now it is stupid. I am going! I am going! (*goes out*).

IVANOV (*alone*). I am a bad, abject, worthless man. One has to be as abject, broken and shattered as Pasha to like and respect me. How I despise myself, my God! How I hate my voice, my step, my hands, these clothes, my thoughts! Isn't it absurd, isn't it mortifying? It's not a year since I was strong and well, I was inexhaustible, full of warmth and confidence, I worked with these same hands, I could speak so as to move even the ignorant to tears, I could weep at the sight of sorrow, was moved to wrath at the sight of wrong-doing. I knew the meaning of inspiration, I felt the charm and poetry of still nights when from sunset to sunrise one sits at one's writing-table or gladdens one's soul with dreams. I had faith, I could look into the future as into my mother's eyes. . . . But now, oh, my God! I am worn out, I have no faith, I spend days and nights doing nothing. My brains do not obey me, nor my hands nor my feet. My property is going to ruin, the forest is falling under the axe (*weeps*). My land looks at me like a deserted child. I expect nothing, I regret nothing; my soul shudders with fear of the morrow. . . . And the way I have treated Sarra! I swore to love her for ever, I promised her happiness, I displayed before her a future she had not imagined in her dreams. She believed me. For

five years I've seen her pining away under the weight of her sacrifice, and worn out by the struggle with her conscience, but, as God is above, there has not been one doubtful glance, not one word of reproach! And here I've ceased to love her. . . . How? Why? What for? I don't understand it. Here she is suffering; her days are numbered, and I, like the meanest sneak, run away from her pale face, her sunken chest, her supplicating eyes. It's shameful, shameful! (*a pause*). Sasha, a child, is touched by my misery. She tells me, at my age, that she loves me, and I am intoxicated, forget everything in the world, enchanted as though by music, and shout "A new life! happiness!" And next day I believe as little in that new life and happiness as in goblins. . . . What's the matter with me? To what depths am I making myself sink? What has brought this weakness on me? What has happened to my nerves? If my sick wife wounds my vanity or a servant does not please me, or my gun misses fire, I become brutal, angry and unlike myself (*a pause*). I don't understand, I don't understand! I might as well shoot myself and have done with it!

LVOV (*enters*). I must have things out with you, Nikolay Alexeyevitch.

IVANOV. If we are to have things out every day, Doctor, it's more than anyone could stand.

LVOV. Will you hear me out?

IVANOV. I hear you out every day, and I still can't make out what it is you want of me.

LVOV. I speak clearly and definitely, and no

one but a heartless man could fail to understand me.

IVANOV. That my wife is dying—I know; that I am hopelessly to blame in regard to her, I know also. That you are an honest, upright man, I know too! What more do you want?

LVOV. I am revolted by human cruelty. . . . A woman is dying. She has a father and mother whom she loves and would like to see before her death; they know quite well that she will soon die and that she still loves them, but, damnable cruelty! they seem to want to impress people by their religious hardness—they still persist in cursing her! You are the man to whom she has sacrificed everything—her home and her peace of conscience; yet in the most undisguised way, with the most undisguised objects, you go off every day to those Lebedyevs! . . .

IVANOV. Oh, I have not been there for a fortnight. . . .

LVOV (*not heeding him*). With people like you one must speak plainly without beating about the bush, and if you don't care to listen to me, then don't listen! I am accustomed to call a spade a spade. . . . Her death will suit you and pave the way for your new adventures; so be it, but surely you might wait? If you would let her die naturally without persistently worrying her by your open cynicism, surely you would not lose the Lebedyev girl and her dowry? If not now, then in a year or two you would succeed, you marvellous hypocrite, in turning the girl's head and getting her money just as easily. . . . Why

are you in such a hurry? Why do you want your wife to die now, and not in a month or in a year? . . .

IVANOV. This is simply agony. . . . You can't be a very good doctor if you imagine that a man can restrain himself indefinitely. It's a fearful effort to me not to answer your insults.

LVOV. Come, whom do you think you are taking in? Throw off your mask!

IVANOV. You clever person, think a little! You suppose there is nothing easier than understanding me, yes? I married Anna for the sake of her fortune . . . they did not let me have it. I made a blunder, and now I am getting rid of her so as to marry another girl and get her money, yes? How simple and straightforward! Man is such a simple, uncomplicated machine. . . . No, doctor, there are too many wheels and screws and levers in any one of us for us to be able to judge each other from the first impression or from two or three external signs. I don't understand you, you don't understand me, and we don't understand ourselves. One may be a good doctor and at the same time utterly ignorant of human nature. Don't be too self-confident, and do see that.

LVOV. Can you really imagine that you are so difficult to see through, and that I am so brainless that I can't see the difference between a rogue and an honest man?

IVANOV. It is evident that we shall never come to an understanding. For the last time I ask you the question, and please answer it without any preliminary words: what exactly do you want of

me? What are you trying to get at? (*Irritably*) And to whom have I the honour of speaking—my judge or my wife's doctor?

LVOV. I am a doctor, and as a doctor I insist on your behaving differently. Your behaviour is killing Anna Petrovna.

IVANOV. But what am I to do? What? Since you understand me better than I understand myself, tell me definitely, what am I to do?

LVOV. At least you might keep up appearances.

IVANOV. Oh, my God! Do you suppose you understand what you are saying? (*drinks water*). Leave me alone. I am infinitely to blame: I must answer for it to God; but no one has authorised you to torment me every day. . . .

LVOV. And who has authorised you to outrage my sense of justice? You torture and poison my soul. Before I came into this district I admitted that silly, mad, impulsive people did exist, but I never believed that there were people so criminal as intentionally, consciously, wilfully to choose the path of evil. . . . I loved and respected mankind, but since I have known you . . .

IVANOV. I have heard about that already.

(*Enter* SASHA.)

LVOV. Oh, have you? (*seeing* SASHA; *she is in a riding habit*). Now I trust we quite understand each other! (*shrugs his shoulders and goes out*).

IVANOV (*with alarm*). Sasha, is it you?

SASHA. Yes, it is me. How are you? You did not expect me? Why haven't you been to see us for so long?

IVANOV. Sasha, for goodness' sake, this is un-

wise! Your coming may have a terrible effect on my wife.

SASHA. She won't see me. I came by the back way. I am just going. I am uneasy: are you well? Why is it you haven't come all this time?

IVANOV. My wife is distressed as it is; she is almost dying, and you come here. Sasha, Sasha, it's thoughtless and inhuman!

SASHA. I couldn't help it. You haven't been to see us for a fortnight, you haven't answered my letters. I was worried to death. I fancied that you were unbearably miserable here, ill, dying. I haven't had one good night's sleep. I am just going. . . . Tell me, anyway, are you well?

IVANOV. No. I torment myself, and people torment me endlessly. . . . It's simply more than I can bear! And now you on the top of it all! How morbid, how abnormal it all is! How guilty I feel, Sasha—how guilty! . . .

SASHA. How fond you are of saying dreadful and tragic things! So you are guilty. . . . Yes? Guilty? Tell me then, what of?

IVANOV. I don't know, I don't know. . . .

SASHA. That's not an answer. Every sinner ought to know what his sins are. Have you forged notes, or what?

IVANOV. That's stupid.

SASHA. Are you guilty because you have changed to your wife? Perhaps, but man is not master of his feelings, you didn't want your feelings to change. Are you guilty because she saw me telling you that I love you? No, you did not want her to see. . . .

IVANOV (*interrupting*). And so on, so on. . . . In love, out of love, not master of his feelings—these are commonplaces, stock phrases, which don't help. . . .

SASHA. It's wearisome talking to you (*looks at a picture*). How well that dog is drawn. Is that from life?

IVANOV. Yes. And all our love story is commonplace and hackneyed: he has lost heart and is plunged in despair, she appears on the scene, full of strength and courage—holds out a helping hand. That's fine and sounds all right in novels, but in real life . . .

SASHA. In real life it's the same.

IVANOV. I see, you've such a subtle understanding of life! My whining excites your reverent awe, you fancy you have discovered a second Hamlet in me, but to my mind my morbid state with all accessories provides good material for ridicule and nothing else! You ought to laugh at my antics while you cry "Help!" To save me, to do something heroic! Oh, how cross I am with myself to-day! I feel this nervous strain will make me do something. . . . Either I shall smash something, or . . .

SASHA. That's it, that's it, just what you ought to do. Break something, smash things, or scream. You are angry with me; it was silly of me to think of coming here. Well, be angry, shout at me, stamp! Well? Begin to rage! (*a pause*). Well?

IVANOV. Ridiculous girl!

SASHA. Excellent! I believe you are smiling! Be kind and graciously smile again!

IVANOV (*laughs*). I've noticed when you begin saving me and giving me good advice your face becomes very, very naïve and your eyes as big as though you were looking at a comet. Wait a minute, your shoulder is dusty (*brushes some dust off her shoulder*). A naïve man is a fool, but you women have the art of being naïve so that it is sweet and natural and warm and not so silly as it seems. But isn't it a queer trick in all of you—so long as a man is strong and well and cheerful, you take no notice of him, but as soon as he begins running rapidly downhill and sets up a whine, you throw yourselves upon his neck! Is it worse to be the wife of a strong, brave man than to be the nurse of some lachrymose failure?

SASHA. Yes, it is.

IVANOV. Why is it? (*laughs*). Darwin knows nothing about it, or he would give it to you! You are ruining the race. Thanks to you there will soon be none but snivellers and neurotics born into the world!

SASHA. There is a great deal men don't understand. Any girl will prefer a man who is a failure to one who is a success, because every woman longs to love actively. . . . Do you understand, actively? A man is absorbed in his work and so love with him is in the background. To talk to his wife, to walk in the garden and spend the time pleasantly with her and weep on her grave—that's all he wants. While with us love is life. I love you, that means that I am dreaming how I shall heal you of your misery, how I shall go to the ends of the earth with you. If you go uphill, I go uphill

too ; if you go down into a pit, I go down into the pit too. To me, for instance, it would be a great happiness to spend a whole night copying your papers, or the whole night watching that no one should wake you, or walking a hundred miles with you ! I remember once three years ago at threshing time you came to see us, all covered with dust, sunburnt and exhausted and asked for water. By the time I brought you a glass, you were lying on the sofa, sleeping like the dead. You slept for twelve hours, and all the time I stood on guard at the door that no one should come in. And how happy I was ! The harder the work, the better the love, that is, the more strongly it's felt, you understand.

IVANOV. Active love. . . . Hm. Decadence, a young girl's philosophy or perhaps that's how it should be . . . (*shrugs his shoulders*). Devil only knows ! (*gaily*). Sasha, on my honour I am a decent man ! . . . Think of this : I have always been fond of generalising, but I have never in my life said that "our women were demoralised" or that "woman was on the wrong track." I have only been grateful to them and nothing else ! Nothing else ! My good little girl, how amusing you are ! And what an absurd duffer I am ! I shock good people and do nothing but whine for days together (*laughs*). Oo-oo ! Oo-oo ! (*walks quickly away*). But do go, Sasha ! we are forgetting . . .

SASHA. Yes, I must go. Good-bye ! I am afraid your honest doctor's sense of duty may make him tell Anna Petrovna that I am here. Listen to me :

go to your wife at once and sit by her, sit by her. . . . If you have to sit by her for a year, sit by her for a year. . . . If it is ten years—sit ten years. Do your duty. Grieve and beg her forgiveness and weep—all that is only right. And, above all, don't neglect your work.

IVANOV. Again I have that feeling as though I were poisoned. Again!

SASHA. Well, God bless you! You need not think about me at all. If you send me a line once a fortnight, that will do for me. I will write to you. . . .

(BORKIN *peeps in at the door.*)

BORKIN. Nikolay Alexeyevitch, may I come in? (*Seeing* SASHA) I beg your pardon, I did not see you . . . (*comes in*). Bong jour! (*bows*).

SASHA (*in confusion*). How do you do?

BORKIN. You have grown plumper and prettier.

SASHA (*to* IVANOV). I am just going, Nikolay Alexeyevitch. . . . I am going (*goes out*).

BORKIN. Lovely vision! I came for prose and stumbled on poetry. . . . (*Sings*) "Thou dids't appear like a bird at dawn." . . .

(IVANOV *walks up and down the stage in agitation.*)

BORKIN (*sits down*). There is a certain something about her, you know, *Nicolas*, unlike other girls. Isn't there? Something special . . . phantasmagoric . . . (*sighs*). As a matter of fact she is the wealthiest match in the countryside, but the mother is such a bitter radish that no one cares to be mixed up with her. When she is dead everything will be left to Sasha, but till then she will

give nothing but a miserable ten thousand, with flat irons and gophering tongs, and one will have to go down on one's knees to her for that too (*fumbles in his pockets*). I'll smoke *De-los-mahoros*. Wouldn't you like one? (*offers his cigar-case*). They are good. . . . They are worth smoking.

IVANOV (*goes up to* BORKIN, *breathless with anger*). Clear out of my house this minute and do not set foot in it again! This minute!

(BORKIN *gets up and drops his cigar.*)

IVANOV. Get out! This minute!

BORKIN. *Nicolas*, what's the matter? Why are you angry?

IVANOV. What for? Where did you get those cigars? And do you suppose I don't know where you are taking the old man every day and what your object is?

BORKIN (*shrugging his shoulders*). But what has that to do with you?

IVANOV. You blackguard! The vile projects which you scatter all over the district have disgraced my name in the eyes of everyone! We have nothing in common, and I beg you to leave my house this minute! (*strides rapidly up and down*).

BORKIN. I know you are saying all this because you are irritated and so I am not angry with you. You can insult me as much as you like (*picks up his cigar*). But it's time to shake off your melancholy. You are not a schoolboy. . . .

IVANOV. What did I say to you? (*trembling*). Are you playing with me?

(*Enter* ANNA PETROVNA.)

BORKIN. Well, here is Anna Petrovna. . . . I will go (*goes out*).

(IVANOV *stops at the table and stands with bowed head.*)

ANNA PETROVNA (*after a pause*). What did she come for just now? (*a pause*). I ask you, what did she come for?

IVANOV. Don't ask me, Anyuta . . . (*a pause*). I am terribly to blame. You can think of anything you like to punish me, I'll bear anything, but . . . don't question me. . . . I am not equal to talking.

ANNA PETROVNA (*angrily*). What has she been here for? (*a pause*). Ah, so that's what you are like! Now I understand you. At last I see what sort of man you are. Dishonourable, mean. . . . Do you remember you came and told a lie, saying that you loved me. . . . I believed you; I gave up my father and mother and my religion and followed you. . . . You told me lies about truth and goodness and your noble plans. I believed every word. . . .

IVANOV. Anyuta, I've never told you a lie.

ANNA PETROVNA. I have lived with you five years. I have been depressed and ill, but I have loved you, and have never left you for a moment. . . . You have been my idol. . . . And all the while you have been deceiving me in the most shameless way. . . .

IVANOV. Anyuta, don't say what is untrue. I have made mistakes, yes, but I have never told a lie in my life. . . . You dare not reproach me with that . . .

ANNA PETROVNA. I see it all now. . . . You married me thinking my father and mother would forgive me and give me money . . . that was what you expected. . . .

IVANOV. Oh, my God! Anyuta, to try my patience like this . . . (*weeps*).

ANNA PETROVNA. Hold your tongue! When you saw the money was not coming, you started a fresh game. . . . Now I remember it all and understand (*weeps*). You never loved me, and were never faithful to me. . . . Never!

IVANOV. Sarra, that's a lie! Say what you like, but don't insult me with lies. . . .

ANNA PETROVNA. Mean, dishonourable man! . . . You are in debt to Lebedyev, and now to wriggle out of your debt you are trying to turn his daughter's head, to deceive her as you did me. Isn't that true?

IVANOV (*gasping*). For God's sake, hold your tongue! I can't answer for myself. . . . I am choking with rage, and I . . . I may say something to hurt you. . . .

ANNA PETROVNA. You have always shamelessly deceived people, not only me. You put down everything discreditable to Borkin, but now I know who is responsible.

IVANOV. Sarra, be quiet! Go away, or I may say something! I feel tempted to say to you something horrible, insulting. . . . (*Shouts*) Hold your tongue, Jewess!

ANNA PETROVNA. I won't be silent. . . . You've deceived me too long, and I must speak. . . .

IVANOV. So you won't hold your tongue (*struggling with himself*). For God's sake . . .

ANNA PETROVNA. Now you can go and deceive the Lebedyev girl. . . .

IVANOV. Well, let me tell you that you . . . are going to die. . . . The doctor told me that you can't last long. . . .

ANNA PETROVNA (*sits down; in a sinking voice*). When did he say that ?.(*a pause*).

IVANOV (*clutches his head*). What a brute I am ! My God, what a brute ! (*sobs*).

CURTAIN.

(*Between the Third and the Fourth Acts about a year elapses.*)

ACT IV

A drawing-room in LEBEDYEV'S *house. In foreground an arch dividing the front drawing-room from the back drawing-room ; doors to right and to left. Old bronzes, family portraits. Everything has a festive look. A piano ; lying on it a violin ; near it stands a 'cello. Throughout the act* GUESTS *cross the stage dressed as for a ball.*

LVOV (*comes in, looking at his watch*). It's past four. I suppose it is just time for the blessing. . . . They will bless her, and take her to church to be married. Here is the triumph of virtue and justice ! He did not succeed in robbing Sarra ; he worried her into her grave, and now he has found another. He will play a part to her too until he has plundered her, and then he will lay her in her grave like poor Sarra. It's the old money-grubbing story . . . (*a pause*). He is in the seventh heaven of bliss : will live happily to old age, and will die with an easy conscience. No, I'll expose you ! When I tear off your damnable mask and all learn what sort of a creature you are, you will fall headlong from the seventh heaven into depths such as the very devil cannot pull you out of ! I am an honest man : it's my duty to interfere and open their blind eyes. I will

do my duty, and to-morrow leave this cursed district for ever! (*Muses*) But how am I to do it? Talking to the Lebedyevs is waste of time. Challenge him to a duel? Make a row? My God, I am as nervous as a schoolboy and have quite lost all power of reflection! What am I to do? A duel?

KOSSIH (*coming in, joyfully to* LVOV). Yesterday I declared a little slam in clubs and took a grand slam. Only that Barabanov spoiled it all again! We were playing. I said "No trumps." He said "Pass." I played the two of clubs. He said "Pass." I played the two of diamonds . . . the three of clubs . . . and would you believe it—can you imagine it!—I declared a slam, and he did not show his ace! If he had shown his ace—the blackguard!—I could have declared a grand slam on no trumps. . . .

LVOV. Excuse me, I don't play cards, and so I cannot share your enthusiasm. Will the blessing be soon?

KOSSIH. It must be soon. They are bringing Zyuzushka to her senses. . . . She is howling like a calf: she is sorry to lose the dowry.

LVOV. And not her daughter?

KOSSIH. It's the dowry. Besides, it's galling for her. If he marries into the family, he won't pay what he owes her. You cannot summon your own son-in-law.

MADAME BABAKIN (*grandly dressed, with a dignified air, walks across the stage past* LVOV *and* KOSSIH; *the latter guffaws into his fist; she looks round*). How stupid!

(KOSSIH *touches her waist with his finger and laughs.*)

MADAME BABAKIN. You lout! (*goes out*).

KOSSIH (*laughs*). The silly woman has gone right off her head! Before she set her cap at a title she was a woman like any other, and now there is no approaching her. (*Mimicking her*) "You lout!"

LVOV (*agitated*). I say, tell me honestly, what is your opinion of Ivanov?

KOSSIH. He is no good. He plays like a cobbler. I'll tell you what happened last year in Lent. We were all sitting down to cards—the Count, Borkin, he and I—and I was dealing . . .

LVOV (*interrupting*). Is he a good man?

KOSSIH. He? He is a shark! He is a tricky fellow; he has seen some ups and downs. . . . The Count and he—they are a pair of them. They have a keen scent for what they can lay their hands on. He put his foot in it with the Jewess, came a cropper, and now he has got his eye on Zyuzushka's money-bags. I'll bet anything, damn my soul, if he does not bring Zyuzushka to beggary within a year. He'll do for Zyuzushka and the Count for the widow. They'll grab the money and live happy ever afterwards. Doctor, why are you so pale to-day? You don't look like yourself.

LVOV. Oh, it's nothing! I drank a little too much yesterday.

(*Enter* LEBEDYEV *and* SASHA.)

LEBEDYEV (*coming in with* SASHA). We can talk here (*to* LVOV *and* KOSSIH). You can go and join the ladies, you Zulus. We want to talk secrets.

KOSSIH (*snaps his fingers enthusiastically as he passes* SASHA). A picture! A queen of trumps.

LEBEDYEV. Run along, you cave-man—run along!

(LVOV *and* KOSSIH *go out.*)

LEBEDYEV. Sit down, Sasha; that's right . . . (*sits down and looks round*). Listen attentively and with befitting reverence. It's like this: your mother has told me to make this communication. . . . You understand, I am not going to say this from myself: it's your mother's orders.

SASHA. Father, do be brief!

LEBEDYEV. You are to have fifteen thousand roubles at your marriage. There. . . . Mind that there is no talk about it afterwards! Wait a minute, be quiet! There are more treats to come. Your portion is fifteen thousand, but, since Nikolay Alexeyevitch owes your mother nine thousand, that is to be deducted from your dowry. . . . Well, besides that . . .

SASHA. What are you telling me this for?

LEBEDYEV. Your mother told me to.

SASHA. Do leave me alone! If you had the slightest respect for me or for yourself, you could not bring yourself to speak to me in this way. I don't want your dowry! I did not ask for it, and do not ask for it!

LEBEDYEV. Why do you fly out at me? In Gogol the two rats first sniffed, then went away, but you are so advanced you fly at me without sniffing.

SASHA. Leave me alone! Don't insult my ears with your reckonings of halfpence!

LEBEDYEV (*firing up*). Tfoo! The way you all go on will drive me to murder someone or stick a knife into myself! One is howling from morning to night, nagging and jawing away, counting her farthings, while the other's so clever, and humane and emancipated—dash it all!—she can't understand her own father! I insult her ears! Why, before coming here to insult your ears, out there (*points to the door*) I was torn to pieces, hacked into bits. She cannot understand! Her head is turned, and she has lost all sense. . . . Confound you all! (*goes to the door and stops*). I dislike it—I dislike everything in you!

SASHA. What do you dislike?

LEBEDYEV. I dislike everything—everything!

SASHA. What everything?

LEBEDYEV. Do you suppose I am going to sit down and begin telling you? There is nothing I like about it, and I can't bear to see your wedding! (*Goes up to* SASHA *and says caressingly*) Forgive me, Sasha, perhaps your marriage is all very clever, honourable, elevated, full of high principles, but there is something all wrong in it—all wrong! It's not like other marriages. You are young and fresh and clear as a bit of glass, and beautiful, while he is a widower, rather frayed and shabby, and I don't understand him, God bless the man! (*kisses his daughter*). Sasha, forgive me, but there is something not quite straight. People are saying all sorts of things. The way his Sarra died, and then the way he was set on marrying you all at once . . . (*briskly*). But there, I am an old woman—an old woman!

I am as womanish as an old crinoline. Don't listen to me. Listen to no one but yourself.

SASHA. Father, I feel myself that there is something wrong. . . . There is—there is! If only you knew how heavy my heart is! It's unbearable! I am ashamed and frightened to admit it. Father darling, do help me to be brave, for God's sake . . . tell me what to do.

LEBEDYEV. What is it? What is it?

SASHA. I am frightened as I have never been before (*looks round*). It seems as though I don't understand him and never shall. All the while I have been engaged to him he has never once smiled, has never looked me straight in the face. He is full of complaints, remorse for something, shudderings, hints at some wrong he has done. . . . I am exhausted. There are minutes when I even fancy that I . . . that I don't love him as I ought. And when he comes to us or talks to me I am bored. What does it all mean, father? I am frightened.

LEBEDYEV. My darling, my only one, listen to your old father. Break it off.

SASHA (*in alarm*). What are you saying?

LEBEDYEV. Yes, really, Sasha. There will be a scandal, all the countryside will be wagging their tongues, but it is better to face a scandal than to ruin your whole life.

SASHA. Don't speak of it, father. I won't listen. I must struggle against gloomy thoughts. He is a fine man, unhappy and misunderstood. I will love him; I will understand him; I will set him on his feet; I will carry out my task. That's settled!

LEBEDYEV. It's not a task—it's neurosis.

SASHA. That's enough. I have confessed to you what I would not admit to myself. Don't tell anyone. Let us forget it.

LEBEDYEV. I can't make head or tail of it. Either I've gone dotty with old age, or you have all grown too clever. Anyway, I can make nothing of it ; I'll be hanged if I can.

SHABELSKY (*entering*). The devil take them all and me into the bargain. It's revolting.

LEBEDYEV. What's wrong with you ?

SHABELSKY. No, seriously, come what may, I must play some dirty, shabby trick so that other people may be as sick as I am. And I will too. Honour bright ! I've told Borkin to announce my engagement to-day (*laughs*). Everyone is a scoundrel, and I'll be a scoundrel too.

LEBEDYEV. Oh, you bore me ! Do you know what, Matvey ?—you will talk yourself into such a state that, excuse my saying so, they will clap you into a madhouse.

SHABELSKY. And is a madhouse worse than any other house ? You can take me there to-day if you like ; I don't care. Everyone is mean, petty, trivial and dull. I am disgusting to myself ; I don't believe a word I say. . . .

LEBEDYEV. I tell you what, Matvey—you should take some tow in your mouth, put a match to it, and breathe out fire and flame. Or, better still, take your cap and go home. This is a wedding ; everyone is making merry, while you croak like a crow. Yes, really. . . .

(SHABELSKY *bends over the piano and sobs.*)

LEBEDYEV. Holy saints! Matvey! Count! What is the matter with you? Matyusha, my dear . . . my angel . . . I have offended you? Come, you must forgive an old dog like me. . . . Forgive a drunkard . . . have some water.

SHABELSKY. I don't want it (*raises his head*).

LEBEDYEV. Why are you crying?

SHABELSKY. Oh, it's nothing! . . .

LEBEDYEV. Come, Matyusha, don't tell stories. What's the reason?

SHABELSKY. I happened to look at that 'cello . . . and thought of the poor little Jewess. . . .

LEBEDYEV. Phew! you've pitched on the right minute to think of her! The kingdom of heaven and eternal peace be hers! But this is not the time to remember her.

SHABELSKY. We used to play duets together. . . . She was a wonderful, splendid woman!

(SASHA *sobs*.)

LEBEDYEV. What's the matter with you now? Give over! Lord, they are both howling! And I—I . . . You might at least go somewhere else; people may see you.

SHABELSKY. Pasha, when the sun shines it's merry in the churchyard. If one has hope one may be happy in old age. But I have no hopes left, not one!

LEBEDYEV. Yes, things really aren't very bright for you. . . . You've no children, no money, no work. . . . Well, it can't be helped. (*To* SASHA) And what's the matter with you?

SHABELSKY. Pasha, give me some money. We'll settle accounts in the next world. I'll go to

Paris and look at my wife's grave. I've given away a lot in my day: I gave away half my property, and so I have a right to ask. Besides, I am asking a friend. . . .

LEBEDYEV (*in a fluster*). My dear boy, I haven't a penny! But all right, all right! That is, I don't promise anything, but you understand . . . very good, very good! . . . (*Aside*) They worry the life out of me.

MADAME BABAKIN (*coming in*). Where is my partner? Count, how dare you leave me alone? Ah, horrid man! (*taps the* COUNT *on the hand with her fan*).

SHABELSKY (*shrinking away*). Leave me alone! I hate you!

MADAME BABAKIN (*aghast*). What? . . . Eh? . . .

SHABELSKY. Go away!

MADAME BABAKIN (*sinks into a chair*). Oh! (*weeps*).

ZINAIDA SAVISHNA (*enters, weeping*). Somebody has arrived. . . . I believe it's the best man. It's time for the blessing (*sobs*).

SASHA (*in a voice of entreaty*). Mother!

LEBEDYEV. Well, they are all howling! It's a quartet! Oh, leave off, you are making the place so damp! Matvey . . . Marfa Yegorovna! . . . Why, I shall cry myself in a minute . . . (*weeps*). My goodness!

ZINAIDA. Well, since you don't care for your mother, since you are disobedient . . . I'll comply with your wishes and give you my blessing.

(IVANOV *comes in; he is in a dress-suit and gloves.*)

LEBEDYEV. This is the last straw! What is it?

SASHA. Why have you come?

IVANOV. I am sorry. May I speak to Sasha alone?

LEBEDYEV. That's not at all the thing for you to come to the bride before the wedding! You ought to be on your way to the church!

IVANOV. Pasha, I beg you . . .

(LEBEDYEV *shrugs his shoulders; he,* ZINAIDA SAVISHNA, SHABELSKY *and* MADAME BABAKIN *go out.*)

SASHA (*severely*). What do you want?

IVANOV. I am choking with fury, but I can speak coolly. Listen! Just now I was dressing for the wedding. I looked in the glass and saw that I had grey hairs on my temples. . . . Sasha, it's not right! While there is still time we ought to break off this senseless farce. . . . You are young and pure, your life is before you, while I . . .

SASHA. That's all stale. I have heard it a thousand times and I am sick of it! Go to the church! Don't keep people waiting.

IVANOV. I am going home at once, and you tell your people that there will be no wedding. Give them some explanation. We have been foolish long enough. I've played the Hamlet and you the noble maiden, and that will do.

SASHA (*flaring up*). What do you mean by speaking like that? I won't listen.

IVANOV. But I am speaking, and I will speak.

SASHA. What have you come for? Your whining is turning into jeering.

IVANOV. No, I am not whining now. Jeering? Yes, I am jeering. And if I could jeer at myself a thousand times more bitterly and set the whole world laughing, I would do it. I looked at myself in the looking-glass and it was as though a shell exploded in my conscience! I laughed at myself and almost went out of my mind with shame (*laughs*). Melancholy! Noble sorrow! Mysterious sadness! To crown it all I ought to write verses. . . . To whine, to lament, to make people miserable, to recognise that vital energy is lost for ever, that I have gone to seed, outlived my day, that I have given in to weakness and sunk over my ears in this loathsome apathy—to feel all this when the sun is shining brightly, when even the ant is dragging his little load and is satisfied with himself—no, thanks! To see some people thinking you a fraud, others sorry for you, others holding out a helping hand, while some—worst of all—listen with reverence to your sighs, look upon you as a prophet, and are all agog for you to reveal some new religion. . . . No, thank God I have still some pride and conscience! As I came here, I laughed at myself and felt as though the very birds, the trees, were laughing at me. . . .

SASHA. This is not anger, it's madness.

IVANOV. Do you think so? No, I am not mad. Now I see things in their true light and my mind is as clear as your conscience. We love each other, but we shall never be married! I can rave and be melancholy as much as I like, but I have no right to ruin other people. I poisoned the last year of my wife's life with my whining. While

you have been engaged to me, you have forgotten how to laugh and have grown five years older. Your father, to whom everything in life was clear, is at a loss to understand people, thanks to me. Whether I go to a meeting, or on a visit, or shooting, wherever I am, I bring boredom, depression, and dissatisfaction with me. Wait, don't interrupt me! I am harsh and savage, but forgive me, I am choked with fury and cannot speak in any other way. I used never to tell lies about life or abuse it, but now that I have become an old grumbler I unconsciously abuse life falsely, repine against destiny and complain, and everyone who hears me is affected by the distaste for life and begins abusing it too. And what an attitude! As though I were doing a favour to nature by living! Damnation take me!

SASHA. Wait a minute. . . . From what you said just now it follows that you are weary of repining and that it's time to begin a new life! . . . And a good thing too. . . .

IVANOV. I see nothing good, and what's the use of talking about a new life? I am lost beyond all hope! It is time for us both to realise it. A new life!

SASHA. Nikolay, pull yourself together! What makes you think that you are lost? Why this cynicism? No, I won't speak or listen. . . . Go to the church!

IVANOV. I am lost!

SASHA. Don't shout like that, the visitors will hear you!

IVANOV. If an educated, healthy man who is

not a fool begins, for no apparent reason, lamenting and rolling downhill, he will roll down without stopping, and nothing can save him! Come, where can I look for help? In what? I can't drink—wine makes my head ache; I can't write bad verse; I can't worship my spiritual sloth and see something lofty in it. Sloth is sloth, weakness is weakness—I have no other names for them. I am done for, done for—and it's no good talking about it! (*looks round*). We may be interrupted. Listen! If you love me, help me. This very minute, at once, break it off with me. Make haste! . . .

SASHA. Oh, Nikolay, if you knew how you exhaust me! How you weary my soul! You are a good, clever man: judge for yourself, how can you set me such tasks? Every day there is some fresh problem, each harder than the one before. . . . I wanted active love, but this is martyrdom!

IVANOV. And when you are my wife the problems will be more complicated still. Break it off! You must understand; it is not love but the obstinacy of an honest nature that is working in you. You've made it your aim at all costs to make a man of me again, to save me. It flattered you to think you were doing something heroic. . . . Now you are ready to draw back but are hindered by a false sentiment. Do understand that!

SASHA. What queer, mad logic! Why, can I break it off with you? How can I break it off? You have neither mother, nor sister, nor friends.

. . . You are ruined, you have been robbed right and left, everyone is telling lies about you. . . .

IVANOV. It was stupid of me to have come here . . . I ought to have done as I meant. . . .

(*Enter* LEBEDYEV.)

SASHA (*runs to her father*). Father, for mercy's sake! He has rushed here as though he were frantic and is torturing me! He insists on my breaking it off; he doesn't want to spoil my life. Tell him that I won't accept his generosity. I know what I am doing.

LEBEDYEV. I can't make head or tail of it. . . . What generosity?

IVANOV. There will be no marriage!

SASHA. There shall be! Father, tell him that there shall be!

LEBEDYEV. Wait a minute, wait a minute! . . . Why don't you want to marry her?

IVANOV. I told her why, but she refuses to understand.

LEBEDYEV. No, don't explain to her, but to me, and explain it so that I can understand! Ah, Nikolay Alexeyevitch, God be your judge! You've brought such a lot of muddle into our life that I feel as though I were living in a museum of curiosities: I look about and I can make nothing of it. . . . It is an infliction. . . . What is an old man to do with you? Challenge you to a duel or what?

IVANOV. There's no need of a duel. All that is needed is to have a head on your shoulders and to understand Russian.

SASHA (*walks up and down the stage in agitation*). This is awful, awful! Simply like a child. . . .

LEBEDYEV. One can only throw up one's hands in amazement, that's all. Listen, Nikolay! To you all this seems clever, subtle, and according to all the rules of psychology, but to me it seems a scandal and a misfortune. Listen to an old man for the last time! This is what I advise you: give your mind a rest! Look at things simply, like everyone else! Everything is simple in this world. The ceiling is white, the boots are black, sugar is sweet. You love Sasha, she loves you. If you love her—stay; if you don't love her—go; we won't make a fuss. Why, it's so simple! You are both healthy, clever, moral, and you have food to eat and clothes to wear, thank God. . . . What more do you want? You've no money? As though that mattered. . . . Money does not give happiness. . . . Of course I understand . . . your estate is mortgaged, you have no money to pay the interest, but I am a father, I understand. . . . Her mother can do as she likes, bless the woman; if she won't give the money, she need not. Sasha says she does not want a dowry. Principles, Schopenhauer. . . . That's all tosh . . . I have a private ten thousand in the bank (*looks round*). Not a dog in the house knows of it. . . . Granny's money . . . that is for you too. . . . Take it, only on one condition: give Matvey two thousand. . . .

(GUESTS *assemble in the back drawing-room*).

IVANOV. Pasha, it's no use talking. I shall act as my conscience tells me.

SASHA. And I shall act as my conscience tells me. You can say what you like, I won't give you up. I'll go and call mother (*goes out*).

LEBEDYEV. I can't make head or tail of it.

IVANOV. Listen, poor fellow. . . . I am not going to tell you what I am—honest or a fraud, healthy or a neurotic. There is no making you understand. I used to be young, ardent, earnest, and not a fool: I loved, I hated, and I believed not as others do; I hoped and did the work of ten; I fought with windmills, I knocked my head against the wall; not measuring my strength, not considering, knowing nothing of life, I took up a burden which broke my back and strained my muscles; I made haste to spend all of myself in my youth; I was intoxicated, I worked myself up, I toiled, I knew no moderation. And tell me, could I have done otherwise? We are few, you know, and there is so much to do, so much! My God! how much! And see how cruelly the life with which I struggled has paid me out! I have overstrained myself. At thirty came the awakening, I was already old and slothful. Exhausted, overstrained, broken, with my head heavy and my soul indolent, without faith, without love, without an object in life, I linger like a shadow among men and don't know what I am, what I am living for, what I want. . . . And I fancy that love is nonsense and tenderness, mawkish, that there is no sense in work, that songs and words of enthusiasm are vulgar and stale, and everywhere I bring with me misery, chilly boredom, dissatisfaction, distaste for life. . . . I am lost beyond all

hope! Before you stands a man worn out at thirty-five; disillusioned, crushed by his own paltry efforts; he is burning with shame, mocking at his own feebleness. . . . Oh, how my pride revolts, how I choke with rage! (*staggering*). There, what I have brought myself to! I am simply reeling. . . . I feel ill. Where is Matvey? Let him take me home.

(VOICES *in the back room: "The best man has come!"*)

SHABELSKY (*entering*). In a shabby, borrowed coat . . . with no gloves . . . and how many jeering looks, silly jokes, vulgar grins on account of it! . . . Disgusting cads!

BORKIN (*enters hurriedly, with a bouquet; he is in evening dress and wearing a flower as the badge of the best man*). Ough! Where is he? (*To* IVANOV) They have been waiting for you at the church for ever so long and here you are airing your views. He is a funny chap! He really is a funny chap! You mustn't go to church with your bride, but separately, with me, and I will come back from the church and fetch the bride. Do you mean to say you don't even know that? He really is a funny chap!

LVOV (*entering, to* IVANOV). Ah, you are here? (*Loudly*) Nikolay Alexeyevitch Ivanov, I proclaim in the hearing of all that you are a scoundrel!

IVANOV (*coldly*). I am very much obliged to you.

(*General perturbation.*)

BORKIN (*to* LVOV). Sir, this is contemptible! I challenge you to a duel!

LVOV. Mr. Borkin, I regard it as degrading not

only to fight, but even to speak with you! But Mr. Ivanov may receive satisfaction whenever he chooses.

SHABELSKY. Sir, I shall fight you!

SASHA (*to* LVOV). What have you insulted him for? What is it for? Gentlemen, please, let him tel me what made him do it.

LVOV. Alexandra Pavlovna, I did not insult him without grounds. I came here as an honest man to open your eyes, and I beg you to hear me.

SASHA. What can you say? That you are an honest man? The whole world knows that! You had better tell me on your conscience whether you understand yourself or not! You have come in here just now as an honest man and flung at him a terrible insult which has almost killed me; in old days, when you used to follow him about like a shadow and poisoned his life, you were convinced that you were doing your duty, that you were an honest man. You have meddled in his private life, you have blackened his name and condemned him; whenever you could you pelted me and all his friends with anonymous letters—and all the time you thought you were a conscientious man. You, a doctor, thought it honourable and did not spare even his sick wife; you gave her no peace with your suspicions. And whatever outrage, whatever cruel meanness you may commit, you will always believe that you are a conscientious and advanced man!

IVANOV (*laughing*). This is not a wedding, but a debate! Bravo, bravo!

SASHA (*to* LVOV). So now think a little: do you

understand yourself or not? Dull-witted, heartless people! (*Takes* IVANOV *by the hand*) Come away, Nikolay! Father, come!

IVANOV. Come where? Wait a minute, I will make an end of it all! My youth is awakened in me, my old self is roused! (*takes out his revolver*).

SASHA (*screams*). I know what he means to do! Nikolay, for God's sake!

IVANOV. I've been rolling down hill long enough, now a halt! It's time to know when to take leave! Stand back! Thanks, Sasha!

SASHA (*screams*). Nikolay, for God's sake! Hold him!

IVANOV Let me alone! (*runs aside and shoots himself*).

CURTAIN.

A SWAN-SONG

A DRAMATIC STUDY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

VASSILY VASSILYITCH SVETLOVIDOV (*an old man of sixty-eight, a Comedian*).
NIKITA IVANITCH (*a Prompter, an old man*).

The action takes place on the stage of a provincial theatre at night after a performance.

A SWAN-SONG

A DRAMATIC STUDY IN ONE ACT

The empty stage of a second-class provincial theatre. On the right, a row of unpainted, roughly made doors leading to the dressing-rooms; the left side and the background of the stage are heaped up with all sorts of litter. There is a stool upside down in the middle of the stage. It is night and dark.

SVETLOVIDOV, *in the costume of Calchas, comes out of the dressing-room with a candle in his hand, laughing.*

SVETLOVIDOV. Here's a how-d'ye-do! Here's a go! I fell asleep in the dressing-room! The performance was over long ago, everyone has gone out of the theatre and here I've been calmly snoring away. Ah, you old fool, you old fool! You are an old dog! I was so tight, I suppose, that I dropped asleep in my chair. You are a clever fellow! I can't say much for you, my dear. (*Shouts*) Yegorka, Yegorka, you devil! Petrushka! They are asleep, the rascals, the plague take them, a hundred devils and one witch! Yegorka (*picks up the stool, sits down on it, and puts the candle on the floor*). There's not a sound. Nothing but the echo answers. . . . I gave Yegorka and Petrushka three roubles each to-day

for looking after me so well—a pack of dogs could not scent them out to-night. . . . They've gone away and I expect they've locked up the theatre, the scamps . . . (*shaking his head*). Drunk! Ough! The wine and the beer I've poured into myself to-day in honour of my benefit, my goodness! I am muzzy all over and my mouth feels as though an army had been camping in it. . . . It's disgusting . . . (*a pause*). It's stupid . . . the old fool has been drinking and can't say what he did it for. . . . Ough, my goodness! My back aches and my head is splitting and I am chilly all over, and my heart feels as cold and dark as a cellar. . . . If you have no consideration for your health, you might at least have pity on your old age, Fool Ivanitch . . . (*a pause*). Old age. . . . You may try and carry it off and put a bold face on it, and play the fool, but you have lived your life . . . sixty-eight years are gone and done with! There's no getting them back. . . . The bottle has been emptied, there are only a few drops at the bottom. . . . There's nothing left but the dregs . . . there it is . . . that's the position. . . . Whether you like it or not, it's time now to rehearse the part of corpse. Mother Death is not far off . . . (*looks in front of him*). I've been on the stage forty-five years and I do believe it is the first time I have seen the theatre in the night. . . . Yes, it's the first time. . . . It's queer, dash it all . . . (*Goes up to the footlights*) One can't see anything. . . . Well, the prompter's box one can just make out . . . and the first box, the music stand . . . but all the rest

is darkness! A black bottomless pit like a tomb in which death itself lurks hidden. . . . Brr! It's cold! There is a draught from it as though from a chimney. . . . This is the very place for calling up spirits! It's uncanny, damn it all. . . . I feel shivers running down my back. . . . (*Shouts*) Yegorka! Petrushka! Where are you, you devils? Good Lord, why am I talking of the evil one? Ach, give up such language, give up drinking, you are old, it's time to die. . . . At sixty-eight people go to matins, prepare for death, while you . . . Oh Lord! Bad language, a drunken face, this fool's costume. . . . It's simply a sickening sight! I'll make haste and change my clothes. . . . It's uncanny! If one had to stay here all night one might die of fright (*goes to his dressing-room; at that moment* NIKITA IVANITCH *in a white dressing-gown comes out of the furthest dressing-room*).

SVETLOVIDOV (*seeing* NIKITA IVANITCH, *utters a scream of terror and staggers back*). Who are you? What have you come for? Whom do you want? (*stamps*). Who are you?

NIKITA. It's only me.

SVETLOVIDOV. Who are you?

NIKITA (*slowly approaches him*). It's me . . . the prompter, Nikita Ivanitch . . . Vassily Vassilyitch, it's me! . . .

SVETLOVIDOV (*sinks helplessly on to the stool, breathing hard and trembling all over*). My goodness, who is it? It's you . . . you, Nikitushka? What are you here for?

NIKITA. I spend the night here in the dressing-

rooms. But for goodness sake don't tell Alexey Fomitch. . . . I have nowhere else to sleep, as God's above, I haven't!

SVETLOVIDOV. You, Nikitushka. . . . My God, my God! They called me before the curtain sixteen times, they presented me with three wreaths and a lot of other things . . . they were all delighted, but not a soul troubled to wake the old drunkard and take him home. . . . I am old, Nikitushka. . . . I am sixty-eight. . . . I am ill! My faint spirit is weary . . . (*lays his head against* NIKITA'S *hand and weeps*). Don't go away, Nikitushka. I am old, I am helpless, I've got to die. . . . It's dreadful, dreadful. . . .

NIKITA (*tenderly and respectfully*). It's time you went home, Vassily Vassilyitch.

SVETLOVIDOV. I am not going! I have no home! no home!

NIKITA. Good Lord! You have forgotten where you live!

SVETLOVIDOV. I don't want to go there, I don't want to. There, I am alone. . . . I have got nobody, Nikitushka, no relations, no wife, no children. . . . I am alone like the wind in the fields. . . . I shall die and there will be no one to pray for me. . . . I am frightened all alone. . . . There is no one to comfort me, to make much of me, to put me to bed when I am drunk. . . . Whom do I belong to? Who needs me? Who cares for me? Nobody cares for me, Nikitushka!

NIKITA (*through his tears*). The public loves you, Vassily Vassilyitch!

SVETLOVIDOV. The public is at home, asleep, they've forgotten their clown! No, nobody needs me, nobody cares for me. . . . I have neither wife nor children.

NIKITA. Well, well, what a thing to grieve over!

SVETLOVIDOV. I am a man, I am alive, I have blood in my veins, not water. I am a gentleman, Nikitushka, of good family. . . . Before I got into this pit I was in the army, an artillery officer. . . . What a fine young fellow I was, how handsome, how straightforward, bold, and spirited! My God, what has become of it all? And afterwards, what an actor I was, Nikitushka, wasn't I? (*gets up and leans on* NIKITA'S *arm*). What has become of it all, where is that time? My God! I looked into this pit just now and remembered everything, everything! This black hole has swallowed up forty-five years of my life, and what a life, Nikitushka! I look into the darkness now and see it all to the smallest detail as I see your face. The transports of youth, faith, ardour, the love of women! Women, Nikitushka!

NIKITA. It's time you were asleep, Vassily Vassilyitch, sir.

SVETLOVIDOV. When I was a young actor, when I was in the first glow of my enthusiasm, I remember a woman fell in love with me for my acting. She was elegant, slender as a poplar, young, innocent, pure, and full of fire as a summer sunset! The darkest night could not have withstood the light of her blue eyes, her exquisite smile. The waves of the sea are shattered on the

rocks, but cliffs, icebergs, snow mountains would be shattered by the waves of her hair! I remember standing before her as I now stand before you. . . . She was lovelier that day than ever she had been, she looked at me so that I shall not forget that look even in my grave. . . . Kindness, velvet, depth, the brilliance of youth! Enraptured, blissful, I sank on my knees before her, I besought her to make me happy. (*Goes on in a sinking voice*) And she . . . she said, "Leave the stage." Leave the stage! Do you understand? She could love an actor, but be his wife, never! I remember that day I was acting. . . . It was a wretched, farcical part. . . . As I played it, I felt that my eyes were opened. . . . I saw then that there was no such thing as holy art, that it was all wild talk and falsity, that I was a slave, a plaything for other people's pastime, a clown, a mummer! I saw through the public then! Since then I have not believed in applause or wreaths or enthusiasm! Yes, Nikitushka! they will applaud me, spend a rouble on my photograph, but I am an alien to them, to them I am so much dirt, almost a prostitute! To please their vanity they will seek my acquaintance, but not one of them would deign to marry his sister or daughter to me. . . . I don't believe in them! (*sinks on the stool*). I don't believe in them!

NIKITA. You don't look like yourself, Vassily Vassilyitch; you quite frighten me. . . . Let me take you home, there's a good man!

SVETLOVIDOV. I saw clearly . . . and dearly I paid for that clear sight, Nikitushka! After

that business . . . after that girl . . . I took to living anyhow, aimlessly, frittering my life away without looking forward. . . . I acted buffoons, scoffers, I played the fool—I was a corrupting influence. But what an artist I was! what a talent I had! I buried my talent, vulgarised and debased my speech, lost the image and semblance. . . . This black hole has devoured me, swallowed me up! I have not felt it before, but to-night . . . when I woke up, I looked back, and there are sixty-eight years behind me. I have only just seen old age! My song is sung (*sobs*)—my song is sung!

NIKITA. Vassily Vassilyitch, darling. . . . Come, calm yourself. Mercy on us! (*Shouts*) Petrushka! Yegorka!

SVETLOVIDOV. And yet what talent I had! what power! You can't imagine what elocution, what feeling and grace, what chords there are here! . . . (*beats himself on the chest*). Enough to choke one! Listen, old man . . . stop, let me get breath. . . . Here, for instance, from "Boris Godunov":

"The shade of Ivan owns me as his son,
And from the grave, as Dmitri has acclaimed,
Has stirred the peoples to revolt for me,
And Boris as my victim has condemned.
I am Tsarevitch. That's enough. 'Tis shame
Before a haughty Polish maid to cringe!"

Well, not bad! (*briskly*). Stop a minute; here's a bit from "King Lear." . . . Black sky, you know, rain, thunder-r-r, lightning—z-z-zh—streaking the whole sky, and then:

" Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world!
Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once,
That make ingrateful man!"

(*impatiently*). Quick now, the fool's cue! (*stamps*). Make haste with the fool's speech! I can't wait!

NIKITA (*acting the fool*). " O nuncle, court holy water in a dry house is better than this rain water out o' door. Good nuncle, in and ask thy daughter's blessing: here's a night pities neither wise man nor fool."

SVETLOVIDOV.

" Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout, rain!
Nor wind, rain, thunder, fire, are my daughters:
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;
I never gave you kingdom, called you children."

Power! Talent! An artist! Something more . . . something more from old days. . . . Let us have a go (*breaks into a happy laugh*) at Hamlet! Come, I'll begin. . . . What shall it

be? Ah, I know . . . (*playing Hamlet*). "Oh, the recorders! Let me see one. (*To* NIKITA IVANITCH) Why do you go about as if you would drive me into a toil?"

NIKITA. "Oh, my lord, if my duty be too bold, my love is too unmannerly."

SVETLOVIDOV. "I do not well understand that. Will you play upon this pipe?"

NIKITA. "My lord, I cannot."

SVETLOVIDOV. "I pray you."

NIKITA. "Believe me, I cannot."

SVETLOVIDOV. "I do beseech you."

NIKITA. "I know no touch of it, my lord."

SVETLOVIDOV. "'Tis as easy as lying: govern these ventages with your fingers and thumb, give it breath with your mouth and it will discourse most eloquent music."

NIKITA. "I have not the skill."

SVETLOVIDOV. "Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery. Do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me." (*Laughs and applauds*) Bravo! bravo! bravo! Where the devil is old age now? There's no old age about that; it's all stuff and nonsense! I feel genius flowing through every fibre of me—it's youth, freshness, life! Where there is talent, Nikitushka, there is no old age! Overcome, Nikitushka? Bowled over. Wait a bit; let me too come to myself a bit. . . . O Lord, O Lord!

Listen now, what tenderness and delicacy, what music! Sh-h . . . quiet!

"Still is the southern night,
In the transparent sky the stars are bright.
Gladly the drowsy air doth welcome sleep,
No tremour stirs the silver poplars' leaves." . . .

(*There is the sound of opening doors.*) What's that?

NIKITA. That must be Petrushka and Yegorka. . . . It is genius, Vassily Vassilyitch; it is!

SVETLOVIDOV (*shouts, turning in the direction of the sound*). This way, my heroes! (*To* NIKITA IVANITCH) Let us go and dress. . . . There is no such thing as old age, it is all nonsense, twaddle . . . (*laughs gaily*). Why are you crying? My dear, silly fellow, what are you blubbering about? Eh, that won't do! That won't do at all! Come, come, old fellow, don't look like that! Why look like that? Come, come . . . (*embraces him with tears in his eyes*). You mustn't cry. . . . Where there's art, where there's genius, there is neither old age, nor loneliness, nor sickness, and death itself is robbed of half its terror . . . (*sheds tears*). Yes, Nikitushka, our song is sung. . . . Genius, indeed! A squeezed lemon, a wretched weakling, a rusty nail, and you are an old stage rat, a prompter. . . . Let us go! (*They go.*) I have no genius. . . . In serious plays I am only fit to be in the suite of Fortinbras . . . and I am too old now even for that. . . . Yes. . . . Do you remember that passage from "Othello," Nikitushka?

"Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell, content!
Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars,
That make ambition virtue! Oh, farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!"

NIKITA. Genius! Genius!

SVETLOVIDOV. Or take this:

"Away! And never to return!
I flee from Moscow through the world to seek,
Where wounded heart may find a place to rest!
A coach! I want a coach!"

(*Goes out with* NIKITA IVANITCH.)

THE CURTAIN DROPS SLOWLY.

AN UNWILLING MARTYR

(A Holiday Episode)

A JEST IN ONE ACT

First performed in 1889

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

IVAN IVANITCH TOLKATCHOV (*father of a family*).
ALEXEY ALEXEYITCH MURASHKIN (*his friend*).

The action takes place in Petersburg, in MURASHKIN'S *flat.*

AN UNWILLING MARTYR

A JEST IN ONE ACT

MURASHKIN'S *study. Upholstered furniture.* MURASHKIN *is sitting at the writing-table. Enter* TOLKATCHOV, *holding in his arms a glass globe for a lamp, a toy bicycle, three hat-boxes, a large parcel of clothes, a fish-basket containing bottles of beer and many small parcels. He looks about him in a dazed way and sinks exhausted on the sofa.*

MURASHKIN. Hullo, Ivan Ivanitch! Delighted to see you! Where do you hail from?

TOLKATCHOV (*breathing hard*). My dear fellow . . . I have a favour to ask you. . . . I entreat you . . . lend me a revolver till to-morrow. Be a friend!

MURASHKIN. What do you want with a revolver?

TOLKATCHOV. I need one. . . . Oh, holy saints! . . . Give me some water. . . . Make haste, water! I need it. . . . I have to pass through a dark wood to-night and so . . . to be ready for anything. Lend it me, there's a good fellow!

MURASHKIN. Oh, nonsense, Ivan Ivanitch! What the devil's this about a dark wood? You've got something in your mind, I suppose? I can

see from your face you are up to no good! But what's the matter with you? Are you ill?

TOLKATCHOV. Stop, let me get my breath. . . . Oh, holy saints! I am as tired as a dog. I have a sensation all over my head and body as though I'd been beaten like a beefsteak. I can bear no more. Be a friend, ask no questions, don't go into details . . . give me a revolver! I implore you!

MURASHKIN. Come, come, Ivan Ivanitch! What weakness! You, the father of a family, a civil councillor! For shame!

TOLKATCHOV. Me the father of a family! I'm a martyr! I'm a beast of burden, a nigger, a slave, a coward who keeps waiting for something instead of despatching himself to the other world! I am a rag, a blockhead, an idiot! What am I living for? What's the object of it? (*leaps up*). Tell me, please, what is it I am living for? Why this endless succession of moral and physical miseries? I can understand being a martyr for an idea, yes! but to be a martyr for goodness knows what, for lamp-shades and ladies' petticoats. No! I'd rather not, thanks! No, no, no! I've had enough of it! Enough!

MURASHKIN. Don't talk so loud, the neighbours will hear!

TOLKATCHOV. The neighbours may hear for all I care! If you won't give me a revolver, someone else will—anyway, I shan't be long among the living! That's settled!

MURASHKIN. Stop, you have pulled off my button. Speak coolly. I still don't understand what's wrong with your life.

TOLKATCHOV. What's wrong? You ask what's wrong? Certainly, I'll tell you! By all means. Perhaps if I have it out, it will make me feel better. . . . Let us sit down. Come, listen. . . . Oh, dear, I can't get my breath! . . . Take to-day, for example. Take it. As you know from ten o'clock in the morning till four o'clock in the afternoon, I have to stick in the office. Baking hot, stuffy, flies, hopeless muddle and confusion. The secretary has taken a holiday, Hrapov has gone off to get married, the small fry of the office have gone dotty over week-ends, love affairs and amateur theatricals. . . . They are all worn out, sleepy and exhausted so that you can get no sense out of them. . . . The secretary's duties are being carried on by an individual deaf in the left ear and in love; the people who come to the office seem to have lost their wits, they are always in a hurry and a fluster—ill-tempered, threatening—such a regular Bedlam that you want to scream for help. Confusion and muddle! And the work is hellish: the same thing over and over again, enquiries and references—all the same like the waves of the sea. Your eyes are ready to drop out of your head, you know. Give me some water. . . . You come out of the office shattered, torn to rags. . . . You ought to have your dinner and a good snooze—but no, you've to remember that it's the summer holidays; that is, that you are a slave, a wretched rag, a miserable lost creature, and must run like a chicken, carrying out commissions. There is a charming custom in our country retreat: if the summer visitor is going

to town, not only his wife, but every wretched holiday-maker is privileged and entitled to burden him with masses of commissions. My spouse insists on my going to the dressmaker and giving her a good scolding, because she has made the bodice too full and the shoulders too narrow; Sonitchka's shoes must be changed; my sister-in-law wants twenty kopecks' worth of crimson silk to match a pattern and two and a half yards of tape. . . . But wait a minute, here I'll read it to you. (*Takes a note out of his pocket and reads it*) A globe for the lamp; one pound of ham sausage; five kopecks' worth of cloves and nutmeg; castor-oil for Misha; ten pounds of granulated sugar; fetch from home the copper stewpan and the mortar for pounding sugar; carbolic acid, insect powder, ten kopecks' worth of face powder; twenty bottles of beer; vinegar and a pair of corsets, size 82, for Mlle. Chanceau. . . . Ough! and fetch from home Misha's greatcoat and goloshes. Those are the orders from my wife and family. Now for the commissions from my dear friends and neighbours, damnation take them. The Vlassins are keeping Volodya's name-day to-morrow; he is to have a bicycle bought him; Madame Vihrin, the wife of the lieutenant-colonel, is in an interesting condition, and so I have to go every day to the midwife and beg her to come. And so on, and so on. I have five lists in my pocket, and my handkerchief is nothing but knots. And so, my dear fellow, in the time between the office and the train, one's tearing about the town like a dog with its tongue out—tearing about and

cursing one's life. From the draper's to the chemist's, from the chemist's to the dressmaker's, from the dressmaker's to the pork butcher's, and then back to the chemist's again. In one place you trip up, in another you lose your money, in the third you forget to pay and they run after you and make a row, in the fourth you tread on a lady's skirt . . . pfoo! Such a form of exercise sends one dotty and makes one such a wreck that every bone aches all night afterwards, and one dreams of crocodiles. Well, your tasks have been performed and everything has been bought—now kindly tell me how is one to pack all this truck? How, for instance, are you going to pack a heavy copper pan and a mortar with a globe for the lamp, or carbolic with tea? How are you going to combine bottles of beer and a bicycle? It's a labour of Hercules, a problem, a riddle! You may rack your brains and do your utmost, but in the end you are sure to break or spill something, and at the station and in the railway carriage you will have to stand with your legs straddling and your arms out, propping up some package with your chin, all hung with fish baskets, cardboard boxes, and such trumpery. And when the train starts the passengers begin hustling your parcels out of the way, for your luggage is all over other people's seats. They make a fuss, call the guard, threaten to have you turned out, but what am I to do? I simply stand and blink at them like a donkey when it is beaten. Now let me tell you what comes next. I get home to my summer villa. Then one does deserve a good drink after

one's day of toil, a meal—a good snooze—doesn t one ?—but not a bit of it ! My wife keeps a sharp eye on me. You've scarcely swallowed your soup before she pounces on you and you must go, if you please, to private theatricals or a dancing club. Don't dare to protest. You are a husband, and the word " husband," translated into holiday language, means a dumb animal who can be driven and laden as you please, with no risk of interference from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. You go and stare at " A Scandal in a Respectable Family " or at " Motya "; you clap your hands at your wife's prompting while you grow weaker, and weaker, and weaker, and feel every minute as though you will expire. And at the club you have to look on at the dancing and find partners for your better-half, and if there are not gentlemen enough, you have to dance the quadrille yourself. You get home from the theatricals or the dancing after midnight, feeling more like a dead sheep than a human being. But now, at last, you reach the longed-for end ; you have undressed and get into bed. Excellent, you can shut your eyes and go to sleep. . . . It's all so nice, so poetical, so snug, you know ; the children are not screaming in the next room, and your wife is not there, and your conscience is at ease—you could wish for nothing better. You drop asleep—and all at once . . . all at once you hear, dz-z-z-z ! The gnats ! (*leaps up*). The gnats, double damnation to them ! (*shakes his fists*). Gnats ! They beat the plagues of Egypt, the tortures of the Inquisition ! Dz-z-z ! It buzzes

so plaintively, so mournfully, as though it were asking your forgiveness; but it bites you, the rascal, so that you are scratching for an hour after. You smoke, you slaughter them, you cover up your head—there is no escape! In the end you curse and give yourself up to be devoured: let the damned brutes bite away! No sooner are you resigned to the gnats than another plague is upon you: your spouse begins practising songs with her tenors in the drawing-room. They sleep all day and spend the night getting up amateur concerts. Oh, my God! Those tenors are a torture, the gnats aren't in it! (*Sings*) "Tell me not thy youth is ruined" . . . "Spellbound again I stand before thee." . . . Oh, the be-easts! They wring the very soul out of my body! To deaden the sound of them a little I have to practise this trick: I tap myself with my finger just by my ear. I go on tapping like that till they go away at four o'clock. Och! Another drink of water, my boy. . . . I can't bear it. . . . Well, so after a night without sleep you get up at six o'clock and—off to the station for your train! You run, you are afraid of being late, and the mud! the fog! the cold—brr! When you get to town, it is the same old hurdy-gurdy over again! There it is! It's a beastly life, I tell you. I wouldn't wish my worst enemy such a life. It has made me ill, do you understand? Asthma, heartburn, I am always in a panic about something; my stomach won't work, my eyes are dizzy. . . . Would you believe it, I have become a regular neurotic . . . (*looks about him*). Only this is strictly between

ourselves. I should like to consult Tchetchott or Merzheyovsky. A sort of frenzy comes over me, my boy. When I am annoyed or driven silly, when the gnats bite or the tenors sing, I have a sudden dizziness before my eyes. I leap up and run all over the house as though I were crazy, shouting, " I thirst for blood ! Blood ! " And at such moments I really long to stick a knife into somebody or bash his head in with a chair. You see what this holiday life may bring one to ! And no one is sorry for me, no one feels for me—they all take it for granted. They actually laugh. But can't you understand, I am a living creature, I want to live ! This isn't a farce, it is a tragedy ! If you won't give me a revolver, you might at least feel for me !

MURASHKIN. I do feel for you.

TOLKATCHOV. I see how you feel for me. . . . Good-bye, I must go and get anchovies, sausage . . . there's still the tooth-powder to get, too, and then to the station.

MURASHKIN. Where are you staying for the holidays ?

TOLKATCHOV. At the Putrid River.

MURASHKIN (*gleefully*). Really ? I say, do you happen to know Olga Pavlovna Finberg who is staying there ?

TOLKATCHOV. I know her. She is a friend of ours, in fact.

MURASHKIN. You don't say so ! What luck ! How fortunate ! It would be nice of you . . .

TOLKATCHOV. What is it ?

MURASHKIN. My dear fellow, would it be

possible for you to do me a small favour? Be a friend! Promise me you will do it?

TOLKATCHOV. What is it?

MURASHKIN. As a friend, I ask you! I entreat you, my dear boy. In the first place give my greetings to Olga Pavlovna, tell her that I am alive and well and that I kiss her hand. And in the second, take her something for me. She commissioned me to buy her a hand sewing-machine, and there is nobody to take it her. . . . Take it, my dear fellow! And while you are about it, you might as well take this cage with the canary . . . only do be careful, or the little door will get broken. . . . Why do you look at me like that?

TOLKATCHOV. A sewing-machine . . . a bird-cage and canary . . . greenfinches . . . linnets. . .

MURASHKIN. Ivan Ivanitch, what is the matter with you? Why are you so red in the face?

TOLKATCHOV (*stamping*). Give me the sewing-machine! Where is the bird-cage? Get on my back yourself! Tear a man to pieces! Eat him up! Make an end of him! (*clenches his fists*). I thirst for blood! for blood! for blood!

MURASHKIN. You are mad!

TOLKATCHOV (*bearing down upon him*). I thirst for blood! for blood!

MURASHKIN (*in terror*). He's gone out of his mind! (*Shouts*) Petrusha! Marya! Where are you? Save me!

TOLKATCHOV (*chasing him about the room*). I thirst for blood! For blood!

CURTAIN.

THE ANNIVERSARY

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

ANDREY ANDREYEVITCH SHIPUTCHIN (*Chairman of the Board of Management of the N—— Mutual Credit Bank, a youngish man with an eye-glass*).

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA (*his wife, aged* 25).

KUZMA NIKOLAYEVITCH HIRIN (*the Bank Cashier, an old man*).

NASTASYA FYODOROVNA MERTCHUTKIN (*an old woman in a pelisse*).

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT.

BANK CLERKS.

The action takes place in the N—— Mutual Credit Bank.

THE ANNIVERSARY

The chairman's office. On the left a door leading to the counting-house. Two writing-tables. The office is furnished with pretensions to refined taste: velvet upholstery, flowers, statues, rugs. Telephone. Midday.

HIRIN *alone; he is wearing felt overboots.*

HIRIN (*shouts at the door*). Send someone to the chemist's for three pennyworth of valerian drops and tell them to bring some clean water to the chairman's office! Am I to tell you a hundred times? (*goes to the table*). I am utterly worn out. I have been writing for the last three days and nights without closing my eyes; from morning till night I am at work here, and from night till morning at home (*coughs*). And I feel ill all over! Shivering, feverish, coughing, my legs ache and there are all sorts of . . . stops and dashes before my eyes (*sits down*). That affected ass, our scamp of a chairman, will read a report to-day at the general meeting: "Our bank at present and in the future." A regular Gambetta . . . (*writes*). Two . . . one . . . one . . . six . . . nought . . . six. . . . He wants to cut a dash and so I have to sit here and work for him like a galley-slave! . . . He has put in nothing but the lyrical touches

in the report and has left me to work for days together adding up figures, the devil flay his soul . . . (*counts on reckoning frame*). I can't endure the man (*writes*). One . . . three . . . seven . . . two . . . one . . . nought. . . . He promised to reward me for my work. If everything goes off well to-day and he succeeds in hoodwinking the public, he promised me a gold medal and a bonus of three hundred. . . . We shall see (*writes*). But if I get nothing for my trouble you must look out for yourself. . . . I am a hasty man. . . . I may do anything if I am worked up. . . . Yes!

(*Behind the scenes there is a noise of applause. Voice of* SHIPUTCHIN: *"Thank you, thank you! I am touched!" Enter* SHIPUTCHIN. *He is wearing a dress-coat and white tie; in his hands an album which has just been presented to him.*)

SHIPUTCHIN (*standing in the doorway and looking towards the counting-house*). I shall keep this present of yours, dear colleagues, to the day of my death in memory of the happiest days of my life! Yes, gentlemen! I thank you once more (*waves a kiss and walks up to* HIRIN). My dear, good Kuzma Nikolayevitch!

(*While he is on the stage* CLERKS *come in occasionally with papers for him to sign, and go out again.*)

HIRIN (*getting up*). I have the honour to congratulate you, Andrey Andreyevitch, on the fifteenth anniversary of our bank, and hope that . . .

SHIPUTCHIN (*presses his hand warmly*). Thank you, dear old man, thank you ! In honour of this glorious occasion, in honour of the anniversary, I think we might even kiss each other. (*They kiss*) I am very glad, very. Thanks for your good work, for everything ! If I've done anything useful during my period of office as chairman of the Board of Management, I am indebted for it above all to my colleagues (*sighs*). Yes, old man, fifteen years, fifteen years as sure as my name's Shiputchin ! (*Eagerly*) Well, what about my report ? Is it getting on ?

HIRIN. Yes. There are only five pages left.

SHIPUTCHIN. Good. Then by three o'clock it will be ready ?

HIRIN. If nobody hinders me, I shall get it done. There's very little left to do.

SHIPUTCHIN. Splendid. Splendid, as sure as my name's Shiputchin ! The general meeting will be at four o'clock. I say, my dear fellow, let me have the first half, I'll go over it. . . . Make haste, give it me (*takes the report*). . . . I expect great things from this report. . . . It's my *profession de foi*, or rather my fireworks . . . fireworks, as sure as my name's Shiputchin ! (*sits down and reads the report*). I am devilish tired, though. . . . I had an attack of gout in the night, I spent all the morning racing about doing things, and then this excitement, this ovation . . . so upsetting ! I am tired !

HIRIN (*writes*). Two . . . nought . . . nought . . . three . . . nine . . . two . . . nought. . . . The figures make my eyes dizzy. . . . Three . . .

one . . . six . . . four . . . one . . . five . . . (*rattles the reckoning beads*).

SHIPUTCHIN. Another unpleasantness. . . . Your wife came to me this morning and complained of you again. She said that you ran after her and your sister-in-law with a knife yesterday. Kuzma Nikolayevitch, what next! Aie, aie!

HIRIN (*sourly*). I will venture, Andrey Andreyevitch, in honour of the anniversary, to ask a favour of you, and beg you, if only out of consideration for my working like a slave, not to meddle in my family affairs! I beg you!

SHIPUTCHIN (*sighs*). You have an impossible temper, Kuzma Nikolayevitch! You are an excellent, estimable person, but with women you behave like some Jack the Ripper! You really do. I can't understand why you hate them so.

HIRIN. And I can't understand why you like them so! (*a pause*).

SHIPUTCHIN. The clerks have just presented me with an album, and the members of the Board, so I hear, are going to present me with an address and a silver tankard . . . (*playing with his eyeglass*). It's fine, as sure as my name's Shiputchin! . . . It's all to the good. . . . We must have a bit of a splash for the sake of the bank, deuce take it! You are one of ourselves, you know all about it, of course. . . . I composed the address myself, I bought the silver tankard myself too. . . . And there, the binding of the address cost 45 roubles. But we have to have that. They would never have thought of it themselves (*looks round him*). Just look at the get-up of the place!

Isn't it fine? Here they tell me that it is petty of me to want the locks on the doors to be polished and the clerks to wear fashionable ties, and to have a stout porter at the entrance. Not a bit of it, my good sir! The locks on the doors and the stout porter are not a petty matter. At home I may be a vulgarian, I may eat and sleep like a pig and drink till I am crazy. . . .

HIRIN. No insinuations, please!

SHIPUTCHIN. Nobody is making insinuations! What an impossible temper you have. . . . Well, as I was saying, at home I may be a vulgarian, a parvenu, and give way to my habits, but here everything must be *en grand*. This is the bank! Here every detail must be impressive, so to speak, and have an imposing air! (*picks up a scrap of paper from the floor and throws it into the fire*). What I do take credit for is having raised the reputation of the bank. . . . Tone is a great thing! It's a great thing as sure as my name's Shiputchin (*scrutinising* HIRIN). My dear fellow, the deputation from the shareholders may be here any minute and you are in your felt overboots and that scarf . . . and a reefer jacket of some nondescript colour. . . . You might have put on a dress-coat or a black frock-coat, anyway. . . .

HIRIN. My health is more precious to me than your shareholders. I am suffering from inflammation all over.

SHIPUTCHIN (*growing excited*). But you must own it's unsuitable? You spoil the *ensemble*!

HIRIN. If the deputation comes in I can keep out of sight. It's no great matter . . . (*writes*).

Seven . . . one . . . seven . . . two . . . one . . . five . . . nought. I don't like anything unsuitable myself. Seven . . . two . . . nine . . . (*rattles the reckoning beads*). I can't stand anything unsuitable. For instance, you would have done better not to have invited ladies to the anniversary dinner to-day!

SHIPUTCHIN. What nonsense!

HIRIN. I know you will let in a whole drawing-room full of them to make a fine show, only mind they'll spoil it all for you. They are the source of every trouble and mischief.

SHIPUTCHIN. Quite the opposite. Feminine society has an elevating influence!

HIRIN. Yes. . . . Your wife is highly cultured, I believe, but last Monday she said something so appalling that I couldn't get over it for two days after. All of a sudden, before outsiders, she blurted out: "Is it true that my husband has bought the Dryazhko-Pryazhky shares which have fallen on the exchange? Oh, my husband is so worried about them!" To say that before outsiders! And what you want to be so open with them for, I can't understand! Do you want them to get you into trouble?

SHIPUTCHIN. Come, that's enough, that's enough! This is all too gloomy for an anniversary. By the way, you remind me (*looks at his watch*). My better-half ought to be here directly. By rights I ought to have gone to the station to meet her, poor thing, but I haven't time and I'm . . . tired. To tell the truth I am not glad she is coming. That is, I am glad, but it would have

been pleasanter for me if she had stayed another two days at her mother's. She will expect me to spend the whole evening with her, and meanwhile we have planned a little excursion when the dinner is over . . . (*shivers*). There, I am in a nervous shiver already. My nerves are so overstrained that I could burst into tears at the slightest provocation! No, I must be firm, as sure as my name's Shiputchin!

(*Enter* TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA *wearing a waterproof and with a travelling satchel slung across one shoulder.*)

SHIPUTCHIN. Bah! Talk about angels!

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA. Darling! (*runs to her husband; prolonged kiss*).

SHIPUTCHIN. And we were just talking about you!

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA (*breathlessly*). Have you missed me? Are you quite well? I haven't been home yet, I've come straight here from the station. I've got ever so much to tell you, ever so much. I can't wait . . . I won't take off my things, I've only looked in for a minute. (*To* HIRIN) How are you, Kuzma Nikolayevitch? (*To her husband*) Is everything all right at home?

SHIPUTCHIN. Quite. Why, you've grown plumper and prettier in the week. Well, what sort of journey did you have?

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA. Splendid! Mamma and Katya send you their love. Vassily Andreyevitch asked me to give you a kiss from him (*kisses him*). Aunt sends you a jar of jam and they are all angry with you for not writing. Zina told me

to give you a kiss from her (*kisses him*). Ah, if only you knew what happened! What happened! I am positively afraid to tell you! Oh, such a dreadful thing happened! But I see from your face you're not glad to see me.

SHIPUTCHIN. Quite the contrary . . . darling . . . (*kisses her*).

(HIRIN *coughs angrily.*)

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA (*sighs*). Ah, poor Katya, poor Katya! I am so sorry for her, so frightfully sorry!

SHIPUTCHIN. It's our anniversary to-day, darling. The deputation from the shareholders may turn up here any minute and you are not dressed.

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA. Really? The anniversary? I congratulate you, gentlemen. . . . I wish you . . . So there will be a party here to-day, a dinner? I like that. . . . And do you remember that splendid address you were so long making up for the shareholders? Will they read it to you to-day?

(HIRIN *coughs angrily.*)

SHIPUTCHIN (*in confusion*). We don't talk about that, darling. . . . Really, you had better go home.

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA. In a minute, in a minute . . . I'll tell you all about it in one instant and then go. I'll tell you all about it from the very beginning. Well . . . when you saw me off I sat down, do you remember, beside that stout lady and began reading? I don't like talking in the train. I went on reading for three stations and did not say a word to anyone. . . . Well, evening came

on and I began to have such depressing thoughts, you know! There was a young man sitting opposite who was quite all right, not bad-looking, rather dark. . . . Well, we got into conversation. . . . A naval officer came up, then a student . . . (*laughs*). I told them I wasn't married. . . . How they flirted with me! We talked till midnight. The dark young man told some awfully funny stories and the naval officer kept singing. . . . My chest simply ached with laughing. And when the officer—ah, those naval men!—when the officer found out accidentally that my name was Tatyana, do you know what he sang? (*Sings in a bass voice*) "Onyegin, I will not disguise it, I love Tatyana madly!" . . . (*laughs*).

(HIRIN *coughs angrily.*)

SHIPUTCHIN. But, Tanyusha, we are hindering Kuzma Nikolayevitch. Go home, darling. Tell me later. . . .

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA. Never mind, never mind, let him listen, it's interesting. I shall have finished directly. Seryozha came to the station to fetch me. A young man turned up too, a tax inspector I believe he was . . . quite all right, very nice, particularly his eyes. . . . Seryozha introduced him and he drove back with us. It was glorious weather. . . .

(*Voices behind the scenes: "You can't, you can't! What do you want?" Enter* MADAME MERTCHUTKIN.)

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN (*in the doorway, waving the clerks off*). What are you holding me for? What next! I want to see the manager! . . .

(*comes in to* SHIPUTCHIN) . . . I have the honour, your Excellency . . . my name is Nastasya Fyodorovna Mertchutkin, wife of a provincial secretary.

SHIPUTCHIN. What can I do for you ?

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. You see, your Excellency, my husband, the provincial secretary Mertchutkin, has been ill for five months, and while he was laid up at home in the doctor's hands he was discharged from the service for no sort of reason, your Excellency. And when I went for his salary, they deducted, if you please, your Excellency, 24 roubles 36 kopecks from it. " What's that for ? " I asked. " Well," they told me, "he borrowed that from the Mutual Benefit club and the other clerks stood security for him." How is that ? How could he borrow it without my consent ? That's not the way to do things, your Excellency ! I am a poor woman, I earn my bread by taking in lodgers. . . . I am a weak, defenceless woman. . . . I have to put up with ill-usage from everyone and never hear a kind word.

SHIPUTCHIN. Excuse me (*takes her petition from her and reads it standing*).

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA (*to* HIRIN). But I must tell you from the beginning. . . . Last week I suddenly got a letter from mamma. She wrote to me that a certain Mr. Grendilevsky had made my sister Katya an offer. An excellent, modest young man, but with no means and no definite position. And unluckily, only fancy, Katya was very much taken with him. What was to be done ? Mamma

wrote that I was to come at once and use my influence with Katya.

HIRIN (*surlily*). Excuse me, you put me out! You go on about mamma and Katya and I've lost count and don't know what I am doing.

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA. As though that mattered! You ought to listen when a lady talks to you! Why are you so cross to-day? Are you in love? (*laughs*).

SHIPUTCHIN (*to* MADAME MERTCHUTKIN). Excuse me, what's this? I can make nothing of it.

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA. You're in love! A-ha! he is blushing!

SHIPUTCHIN (*to his wife*). Tanyusha, go into the counting-house for a minute, darling. I shan't be long.

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA. Very well (*goes out*).

SHIPUTCHIN. I can make nothing of it. Evidently you have come to the wrong place, madam. Your petition has nothing to do with us at all. You will have to apply to the department in which your husband was employed.

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Why, my dear sir, I have been to five places already and they would not even take the petition anywhere. I'd quite lost my head, but my son-in-law, Boris Matveyitch—God bless him for it—advised me to come to you. "You go to Mr. Shiputchin, mamma," he said, "he is an influential man, he can do anything for you." . . . Help me, your Excellency!

SHIPUTCHIN. We can do nothing for you, Madame Mertchutkin. You must understand: your husband, so far as I can see, served in the

Army Medical Department, and our establishment is a purely private commercial undertaking, a bank. Surely you must understand that!

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Your Excellency, I have the doctor's certificate that my husband was ill! Here it is, if you will kindly look at it!

SHIPUTCHIN (*irritably*). Very good, I believe you, but I repeat it has nothing to do with us.

(*Behind the scenes* TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA'S *laugh; then a masculine laugh.*)

SHIPUTCHIN (*glancing towards the door*). She is hindering the clerks there. (*To* MADAME MERTCHUTKIN) It's queer and absurd, indeed. Surely your husband must know where you ought to apply.

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. He knows nothing, your Excellency. He keeps on "It's not your business, go away"—that's all I can get out of him.

SHIPUTCHIN. I repeat, madam: your husband was in the Army Medical Department, and this is a bank, a purely private commercial undertaking. . . .

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Yes, yes, yes. . . . I understand, sir. In that case, your Excellency, tell them to pay me fifteen roubles at least! I agree to take part on account.

SHIPUTCHIN (*sighs*). Ough!

HIRIN. Andrey Andreyitch, at this rate I shall never have the report done!

SHIPUTCHIN. One minute. (*To* MADAME MERTCHUTKIN) There's no making you see reason. Do understand that to apply to us with such a petition

is as strange as to send a petition for divorce to a chemist's, for instance, or to the Assaying Board.

(*A knock at the door.* TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA'S *voice:* "*Andrey, may I come in?*")

SHIPUTCHIN (*shouts*). Wait a little, darling; in a minute! (*To* MADAME MERTCHUTKIN) You have not been paid your due, but what have we to do with it? Besides, madam, it's our anniversary to-day; we are busy . . . and someone may come in here at any minute. . . . Excuse me.

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Your Excellency, have pity on a lone lorn woman! I am a weak, defenceless woman. . . . I am worried to death. . . . I have a lawsuit with my lodgers, and I have to see to my husband's affairs and fly round looking after the house, and my son-in-law is out of a job.

SHIPUTCHIN. Madame Mertchutkin, I . . . No, excuse me, I cannot talk to you! My head is going round. . . . You are hindering us and wasting time . . . (*sighs, aside*). She's an idiot, as sure as my name is Shiputchin! (*To* HIRIN) Kuzma Nikolayevitch, please will you explain to Madame Mertchutkin . . . (*with a wave of his hand goes out of the office*).

HIRIN (*going up to* MADAME MERTCHUTKIN, *surlily*). What can I do for you?

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. I am a weak, defenceless woman. . . . I look strong perhaps, but if you were to overhaul me there isn't one healthy fibre in me! I can scarcely keep on my feet, and my appetite is gone. I drank my cup of coffee this morning without the slightest relish.

HIRIN. I am asking you what I can do for you.

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Bid them pay me fifteen roubles, sir, and I'll take the rest in a month's time.

HIRIN. But you've been told already in plain words: this is a bank.

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Yes, yes. . . . And if necessary I can produce a medical certificate.

HIRIN. Have you got a head on your shoulders, or what?

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. My dear man, I am asking for what is my due. I don't want other people's money.

HIRIN. I ask you, madam, have you got a head on your shoulders, or what? I'll be damned if I waste my time talking to you. I am busy. (*Points to the door*) Kindly walk out!

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN (*surprised*). And what about the money?

HIRIN. The fact is, what you've got on your shoulders is not a head, but this . . . (*taps with his finger on the table and then on his own forehead*).

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN (*offended*). What? Come, come! . . . Talk to your own wife like that. . . . My husband is a provincial secretary! You'd better look out!

HIRIN (*firing up, in a low voice*). Clear out!

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Come, come, come! . . . Look out!

HIRIN (*in a low voice*). If you don't leave the room this very minute, I'll send for the porter. Clear out! (*stamps*).

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Not a bit of it! I am

not afraid of you. I've seen the likes of you. . . . You screw!

HIRIN. I don't believe I've ever in my life seen a nastier woman. . . . Ough! It makes me feel dizzy . . . (*breathing hard*). I tell you once more . . . do you hear? If you don't leave the room, you old scarecrow! I'll pound you to a jelly. I've such a temper, I might cripple you for life! I might commit a crime!

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. More bark than bite. I'm not afraid of you. I've seen the likes of you.

HIRIN (*in despair*). I can't bear the sight of her! I feel ill! I can't stand it (*goes to the table and sits down*). They let loose a swarm of women on the bank: I can't write the report! I can't do it!

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. I am not asking for other people's money: I am asking for my own—for what is my lawful due. Ah, the shameless fellow! He is sitting in a public office with his overboots on. . . . The lout!

(*Enter* SHIPUTCHIN *and* TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA.)

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA (*following her husband in*). We went to an evening party at the Berezhnitskys'. Katya was wearing a pale blue foulard with light lace and a low neck. . . . It does suit her doing her hair up high, and I did it for her myself. . . . When she was dressed and had her hair done she looked simply fascinating!

SHIPUTCHIN (*by now suffering from migraine*). Yes, yes . . . fascinating! . . . They may come in here in a minute.

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Your Excellency!

SHIPUTCHIN (*despondently*). What now? What can I do for you?

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Your Excellency! (*pointing to* HIRIN). Here, this man . . . he here, this man, tapped himself on the forehead and then tapped the table. . . . You told him to go into my case, and he is jeering at me and saying all sorts of things. I am a weak, defenceless woman.

SHIPUTCHIN. Very good, madam; I will go into it. . . . I will take steps. . . . Go away! Later. (*Aside*) My gout is coming on!

HIRIN (*goes quietly up to* SHIPUTCHIN). Andrey Andreyitch, send for the porter; let him kick her out! It's too much of a good thing!

SHIPUTCHIN (*in alarm*). No, no! She'll set up a squeal, and there are lots of flats in the building.

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Your Excellency!

HIRIN (*in a tearful voice*). But I've got to finish the report! I shan't finish it in time! . . . (*goes back to the table*). I can't do it!

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Your Excellency, when shall I receive the money? I need it to-day.

SHIPUTCHIN (*aside, with indignation*). A re-mar-kab-ly nasty woman. (*To her, softly*) Madam, I have told you already, this is a bank—a private commercial establishment.

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Do me a kindness, your Excellency! Be a father to me! . . . If the medical certificate is not enough, I can produce an affidavit from the police. Tell them to give me the money!

SHIPUTCHIN (*sighs heavily*). Ough!

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA (*to* MADAME MERTCHUTKIN). Granny, you've been told that you are hindering them. It's too bad of you, really.

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. My pretty lady, I've no one to take my part. I might just as well not eat or drink. I drank my cup of coffee this morning without the slightest relish.

SHIPUTCHIN (*exhausted, to* MADAME MERTCHUTKIN). How much do you want?

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Twenty-four roubles thirty-six kopecks.

SHIPUTCHIN. Very good (*takes a twenty-five rouble note out of his pocket-book and gives it to her*). Here is twenty-five roubles. Take it . . . and go!

(HIRIN *coughs angrily.*)

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Thank you kindly, your Excellency (*puts the money away*).

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA (*sitting down by her husband*). It's time for me to go home (*looking at her watch*). . . . But I haven't finished my story. It won't take me a minute to tell you the rest, and then I am going. . . . Something so dreadful happened! And so we went to an evening party at the Berezhnitskys'. . . . It was all right—very jolly—but nothing special. . . . Of course, Katya's admirer Grendilevsky was there too. . . . Well, I had talked to Katya, I had cried; I'd used my influence; she had it out with Grendilevsky on that very evening and refused him. Well, I thought, everything is settled for the best: I had set mamma's mind at rest, I had

saved Katya, and now I could be comfortable myself. . . . And what do you think? Just before supper Katya and I were walking along an avenue in the garden. . . . All of a sudden . . . (*excited*) all of a sudden we hear a shot. . . . No, I can't talk of it! (*fans herself with her handkerchief*). No, I can't!

SHIPUTCHIN (*sighs*). Ough!

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA (*weeping*). We ran into the arbour, and there . . . there lay poor Grendilevsky . . . with a pistol in his hand. . . .

SHIPUTCHIN. No, I can't stand it! I can't stand it! (*To* MADAME MERTCHUTKIN) What more do you want?

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Your Excellency, couldn't you find another job for my husband?

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA (*weeping*). He had aimed straight at his head . . . here. . . . Katya fell down fainting, poor darling! . . . And he lay there terribly frightened, and . . . and asked us to send for a doctor. Soon a doctor arrived and . . . and saved the poor fellow. . . .

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Your Excellency, couldn't you find another job for my husband?

SHIPUTCHIN. No, I can't stand it! (*weeps*). I can't stand it! (*holds out both hands to* HIRIN *in despair*). Turn her out! Turn her out, I implore you!

HIRIN (*going up to* TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA). Clear out!

SHIPUTCHIN. Not her, but this . . . this awful woman . . . (*points to* MADAME MERTCHUTKIN) this one!

HIRIN (*not understanding, to* TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA). Clear out! (*stamps*). Clear out!

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA. What? What are you about? Have you gone off your head?

SHIPUTCHIN. This is awful! I'm done for! Turn her out! Turn her out!

HIRIN (*to* TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA). Get out! I'll smash you! I'll make mincemeat of you! I'll do something criminal!

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA (*runs away from him; he runs after her*). How dare you! You insolent creature! (*screams*). Andrey! Save me, Andrey! (*shrieks*).

SHIPUTCHIN (*runs after them*). Leave off! I implore you! Hush! Spare me!

HIRIN (*chasing* MADAME MERTCHUTKIN). Clear out! Catch her! Beat her! Cut her throat!

SHIPUTCHIN (*shouts*). Leave off! I beg you! I implore!

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Holy saints! . . . Holy saints! (*squeals*). Holy saints!

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA (*screams*). Save me! Save me! . . . Ah! Oh! . . . I feel faint! I feel faint! (*jumps on to a chair, then falls on the sofa and moans as though in a swoon*).

HIRIN (*chasing* MADAME MERTCHUTKIN). Beat her! Give it her hot! Kill her!

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN. Oh! Oh! . . . Holy saints! I feel dizzy! Oh! (*falls fainting in* SHIPUTCHIN'S *arms*).

(*A knock at the door and a voice behind the scenes: "The deputation."*

SHIPUTCHIN. Deputation . . . reputation . . . occupation ! . . .

HIRIN (*stamps*). Get out, damn my soul ! (*tucks up his sleeves*). Let me get at her ! I could do for her !

(*Enter the* DEPUTATION, *consisting of five persons ; all are in dress-coats. One holds in his hands the address in a velvet binding, another the silver tankard.* CLERKS *look in at the door.* TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA *on the sofa,* MADAME MERTCHUTKIN *in* SHIPUTCHIN'S *arms, both uttering low moans.*)

ONE OF THE DELEGATES (*reads aloud*). Dear and highly respected Andrey Andreyevitch ! Casting a retrospective glance over the past of our financial institution, and taking a mental view of its gradual development, we obtain a highly gratifying impression. It is true that in the early years of its existence the limited amount of our original capital, the absence of any important transactions, and also the indefiniteness of our policy, forced into prominence Hamlet's question : To be or not to be ? And at one time voices were even raised in favour of closing the bank. But then you took the management. Your knowledge, your energy, and your characteristic tact have been the cause of our extraordinary success and exceptional prosperity. The reputation of the bank (*coughs*) . . . the reputation of the bank . . .

MADAME MERTCHUTKIN (*moans*). Oh ! Oh !

TATYANA ALEXEYEVNA (*moans*). Water ! Water !

THE DELEGATE (*continues*). The reputation . . . (*coughs*) the reputation of the bank has been raised by you to such a pinnacle that our bank may now rival the foremost institutions of the kind in foreign countries.

SHIPUTCHIN. Deputation . . . reputation . . . occupation ! . . . Two friends one summer evening walked, and sagely of deep matters talked. . . . Tell me not thy youth is ruined, poisoned by my jealous love. . . .

THE DELEGATE (*continues in confusion*). Then, turning an objective eye upon the present we, dear, highly respected Andrey Andreyevitch . . . (*Dropping his voice*) Perhaps later . . . we'd better come again later . . . (*They walk out in confusion.*)

CURTAIN

ON THE HIGH ROAD

A DRAMATIC STUDY IN ONE ACT

Performance forbidden by the Censor in 1885

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

TIHON YEVSTIGNEYEV (*keeper of an Inn on a high road*).
SEMYON SERGEYEVITCH BORTSOV (*a ruined Landowner*).
MARYA YEGOROVNA (*his wife*).
SAVVA (*an old Pilgrim*).
NAZAROVNA, YEFIMOVNA (*Pilgrim women*).
FEDYA (*a Factory hand*).
YEGOR MERIK (*a Tramp*).
KUZMA (*a passing Traveller*).
POSTMAN.
DENIS (*Madame Bortsov's Coachman*).
PILGRIMS, DROVERS, WAYFARERS, *etc.*

The action takes place in one of the Southern Provinces of Russia.

ON THE HIGH ROAD

A DRAMATIC STUDY IN ONE ACT

Room in TIHON'S *Inn. On right a counter and shelves full of bottles. In the background a door opening on to the road, with a dirty red lantern hanging above it outside. The floor and the benches round the walls are crowded with* PILGRIMS *and* WAYFARERS. *Many unable to find space to lie down are asleep in a sitting posture. The middle of the night. As the Curtain goes up there is a clap of thunder, and a flash of lightning is seen through the open door.*

TIHON *is at the counter. On one of the benches* FEDYA *sits, half reclining, and playing softly on the concertina. By his side is sitting* BORTSOV *dressed in shabby summer clothes.* SAVVA, NAZAROVNA *and* YEFIMOVNA *are lying on the floor near the benches.*

YEFIMOVNA (*to* NAZAROVNA). Give the poor old man a nudge, mother! I do believe he is dying!

NAZAROVNA (*raising the corner of* SAVVA'S *coat from off his face*). Good Christian! Hey, good Christian! Are you alive or dead?

SAVVA. Why dead? I am alive, mother! (*raises himself on his elbow*). Cover up my legs, my good soul! That's it. More on the right one. That's it. God bless you!

NAZAROVNA (*covering* SAVVA'S *legs*). Sleep, good man.

SAVVA. No chance of sleep! If only I have the patience to bear this agony, I don't mind about sleep, my good soul. A sinner does not deserve to be in peace. What is that noise, good pilgrim woman?

NAZAROVNA. God is sending us a storm. The wind's howling, and the rain is lashing and lashing. It's pattering like peas on the window-panes and on the roof. Do you hear? The flood-gates of Heaven are opened... (*thunder*). Holy, holy, holy...

FEDYA. It thunders and roars and howls, and there is no end to it. . . . Goo-oo-oo! . . . It's like the roar of the forest. . . . Goo-oo-oo! . . . The wind is like a dog howling (*he shivers*). It's cold . . . my clothes are wet, you could wring them out. . . . The door is open . . . (*plays softly*). My concertina has got wet, good Christians—there is no music in it, or I'd screw out of it a concert that would bowl you over! Glorious! A quadrille or a polka, let us say . . . or a Russian dance-song. We can manage all that. When I was waiter at the Grand Hotel I did not save money, but I learnt all there was to learn on the concertina. And I can play the guitar, too. . . .

VOICE (*from the corner*). A fool and a fool's talk!

FEDYA. And it's from a fool I hear it! (*a pause.*)

NAZAROVNA (*to* SAVVA). You ought to be lying in the warm now, old man, and warming your poor leg (*a pause*). Old man! Good Christian! (*nudges* SAVVA). Are you going to die?

FEDYA. You had better have a drop of vodka, grandfather. You drink it off, it will burn for a while in your stomach, but it will draw it away from your heart a bit! Drink it!

NAZAROVNA. Don't talk lightly, lad! The old man, maybe, is giving up his soul to God and is repenting of his sins. And you say such things and play your concertina. . . . Give over the music, you impudent fellow!

FEDYA. Why do you pester him? He is not well, and you . . . Women's silliness! . . . He is a saintly man and can't say a rude word to you, and you take advantage of it, pleased at his listening to your foolishness. . . . Sleep, grandfather—don't listen! Let her talk, but don't you heed. . . . A woman's tongue is a devil's broom—it will sweep the wise and the cunning out of the house. Never heed them . . . (*clasps his hands in horror*). But how thin you are, my dear! Awful! A regular dead skeleton! No live-stock in you! Are you really dying?

SAVVA. Dying? What for? The Lord spare me an untimely death. . . . I shall be bad for a bit, and then with God's help I shall get up again. . . . The Mother of God will not let me die in a strange land . . . I shall die at home. . . .

FEDYA. Do you come from far?

SAVVA. From Vologda. From the town itself. . . . I am a workman there. . . .

FEDYA. And where is this Vologda?

TIHON. Beyond Moscow . . . A province. . . .

FEDYA. Tut, tut, tut! . . . You've come a long way, old bushy-beard! And all on foot?

SAVVA. All on foot, lad. I've been at Saint Tihon's in Zadonsk, and I am going to the Holy Mountains . . . from the Holy Mountains, if it's the Lord's will, to Odessa. . . . From there, they say, they'll take you cheap to Jerusalem . . . for twenty-one roubles, so I'm told. . . .

FEDYA. And have you been in Moscow?

SAVVA. To be sure! Five times. . . .

FEDYA. Is it a good town? (*lights a cigarette*). Worth seeing?

SAVVA. There are many holy shrines, lad. . . . Where there are many holy shrines there it is always good. . . .

BORTSOV (*goes up to the counter, to* TIHON). Once more I entreat you! Give it me, for Christ's sake!

FEDYA. The chief thing in a town is cleanliness. . . . If there's dust, they should water the streets; if there's mud, they should clean them. There must be tall houses . . . a theatre . . . police . . . cabs. . . . I've lived in towns myself—I know.

BORTSOV. One little glass . . . this little glass here. You can put it down, you know! I'll pay you!

TIHON. We know all about that.

BORTSOV. Come, I beg you! Do me a kindness!

TIHON. Go along!

BORTSOV. You don't understand me. . . . Do understand, you ignorant dolt, if there is an ounce of brain in your wooden peasant skull, it isn't I that am asking, it's my inside asking—to talk like you, like a peasant! It's my illness that's asking! You must understand!

TIHON. There's nothing to understand. . . . Get along!

BORTSOV. Why, if I don't have a drink this minute—you must understand—if I don't satisfy my craving, I may do something dreadful! God knows what I may not do! You must have seen a lot of drinking people in your pot-house existence; surely you must by now have got a notion of what such people feel like? Why, they are ill! You may chain them up, you may beat them, stick knives into them, if only you give them vodka! Come, I beg you most humbly! Do me a kindness! I am humiliating myself. Good God, how I'm humiliating myself!

TIHON. Give me the money and then you shall have the vodka.

BORTSOV. Where can I get the money? Everything has gone for drink! There's nothing left! What can I give you? This overcoat here is all I have, but I can't give it to you. . . . I have nothing on underneath. . . . Will you have my cap? (*takes off cap and gives it to* TIHON).

TIHON (*examining the cap*). Hm. . . . There are caps and caps. . . . It's all in holes like a sieve. . . .

FEDYA (*laughs*). It's a gentleman's cap! One

to walk out in the street in and to take off to the young ladies. "Good day, good day! How do you do!"

TIHON (*gives the cap back to* BORTSOV). I wouldn't take it as a gift. Filthy rubbish.

BORTSOV. You don't care for it? Then give me some on credit. I'll look in on my way back from the town and pay you your five kopecks. You may choke yourself with your five kopecks then! You may choke! I hope they will stick in your throat! (*coughs*). I hate you!

TIHON (*banging the counter with his fist*). Why do you keep on? Who are you? A pickpocket, or what? What are you here for?

BORTSOV. I want a drink! It's not I want it, it's my illness. Can't you understand?

TIHON. Don't try my patience! You'll find yourself out on the steppe pretty quick!

BORTSOV. What am I to do? (*moves away from the counter*). What am I to do? (*ponders*).

YEFIMOVNA. It's the devil fretting you. Don't heed him, master! He, curse him! keeps whispering to you, "Drink, drink!" but you answer back, "I won't drink—I won't!" He'll give over.

FEDYA. I expect there's a hammer going in your head and your stomach pinches you! (*laughs*). You are a crazy one, your honour! Lie down and go to sleep! It's no good standing up there like a scarecrow. It's not a kitchen garden!

BORTSOV (*angrily*). Hold your tongue! Nobody asked your opinion, ass!

FEDYA. Mind what you are talking about! I know the likes of you! There are plenty of

your sort tramping the high roads! As for asses, wait till I box your ears, then you'll howl worse than the wind. You are an ass yourself! Silly fool! (*a pause*). Dirty cad!

NAZAROVNA. The holy man maybe is saying his prayers and giving up his soul to God, while these infidels are trying to pick a quarrel and saying all sorts of things. . . . Shameless fellows!

FEDYA. Don't go on canting, you old cabbage-stump! If you are in a pothouse, put up with pothouse ways.

BORTSOV. What is there for it? What am I to do? How can I appeal to him? What words are needed more? (*To* TIHON) The blood is stagnant in my veins! Uncle Tihon! (*weeps*) Uncle Tihon!

SAVVA (*groans*). There is shooting in my leg like a bullet of fire. . . . Good pilgrim woman, little mother!

YEFIMOVNA. What is it, good man?

SAVVA. Who is that crying?

YEFIMOVNA. The gentleman.

SAVVA. Ask the gentleman to shed a tear for me too, that I may die in Vologda. A prayer with tears is more acceptable.

BORTSOV. I am not praying, grandfather! These are not tears! My heart has been wrung and the blood is running out! (*sits down at* SAVVA'S *feet*). The blood! But you won't understand! You can't grasp it, grandfather, with your dim understanding. You are people that sit in darkness!

SAVVA. Where are there any that have light?

BORTSOV. There are some that have light, grandfather. . . . They would understand!

SAVVA. There are, there are, my son. . . . The saints had light. . . . They understood every sorrow. . . . Without your telling them, they would understand. . . . They'll look into your eyes and understand. . . . And you are so comforted by their understanding you, it's as though you had had no sorrow—it's all gone!

FEDYA. And have you seen the saints, then?

SAVVA. Yes, I have, lad. . . . There are folks of all sorts on earth. There are sinners and there are servants of God.

BORTSOV. I don't understand . . . (*gets up quickly*). One must have some sense to understand what people say, and I haven't any now. I have nothing but an instinct, a thirst! (*goes rapidly to the counter*). Tihon, take my overcoat! Do you understand? (*is about to take off his overcoat*). The overcoat . . .

TIHON. And what have you got on under it? (*looks under* BORTSOV'S *coat*). Your bare skin? Don't take it off, I won't have it. . . . I am not going to take a sin upon my soul.

(*Enter* MERIK.)

BORTSOV. Very good, I take the sin on myself. Do you agree?

MERIK (*in silence takes off his outer coat and remains in his jerkin. He has an axe stuck in his belt*). Some people are cold, but a bear and a man who is wanted are always hot. I am all in a sweat! (*puts the axe on the floor and takes off his jerkin*) You are wet through with sweat

by the time you have pulled one leg out of the mud. As soon as one foot is free, the other is stuck.

YEFIMOVNA. That's true. . . . Tell me, good lad, is the rain giving over?

MERIK (*after looking at* YEFIMOVNA). I don't waste words on women (*a pause*).

BORTSOV (*to* TIHON). I take the sin on myself! Do you hear?

TIHON. I don't want to hear, leave off!

MERIK. It's as dark as though someone had been tarring the sky. You can't see your own nose. The rain cuts you in the face like snow (*picks up his clothes and his axe*).

FEDYA. For rascals like you, it's first-rate. The beast of prey takes shelter, but for you devils, it's a holiday.

MERIK. Who was it said that?

FEDYA. Just look. . . . I suppose you are not blind.

MERIK. We'll make a note of it. (*Goes up to* TIHON) Hullo, old fat face! Don't you know me?

TIHON. If I had to know all you drunken fellows that wander on the high road, I'd want a dozen eyes at least.

MERIK. Take a good look . . . (*a pause*).

TIHON. Well, I do declare, I know you! I knew you by your eyes! (*offers his hand*). Andrey Polikarpov?

MERIK. I was Andrey Polikarpov, but now I am Yegor Merik.

TIHON. What's that for?

MERIK. Whatever passport God sends me, that's my name. I've been Merik for two months now . . . (*Thunder*). Rr-rr-rr . . . thunder away, I am not afraid (*looks about*). No bloodhounds here?

TIHON. Bloodhounds, indeed! Midges and gnats, mostly. . . . A soft lot. . . . The bloodhounds are snoring in their feather-beds by now, I bet. . . . (*Aloud*) Good Christians, look out for your pockets and your clothes, if you mind about them. He is a smart fellow! He'll rob you.

MERIK. Well, they'd better take care of their money, if they've got any, but clothes I won't touch. I've no use for them.

TIHON. Where's the devil taking you?

MERIK. To Kuban.

TIHON. You don't say so!

FEDYA. To Kuban? Really? (*sits up*). It's a fine place. You might sleep for three years and never dream of as fine a place. So wide and free! They say there's no end to the birds and game and wild beasts of all sorts! Grass grows all the year round. People live like friends, there's such a lot of land they don't know what to do with it! The government they say . . . a soldier was telling me the other day . . . gives three hundred acres per head. That's the place to be happy, strike me dead!

MERIK. Happy. . . . Happiness is always behind you. . . . There's no seeing it. When you can bite your elbow you'll see happiness. . . . It's all foolishness. (*Looks round the benches and*

the people) It's like a convict station! . . . Good evening, poor folks!

YEFIMOVNA (*to* MERIK). You've such wicked eyes! The evil one is in you, lad. . . . Don't look at us.

MERIK. Good evening, poor people!

YEFIMOVNA. Turn away! (*nudges* SAVVA). Savva dear, the wicked man is looking at us. He'll do you harm, my dear! (*To* MERIK) Turn away, I tell you, serpent!

SAVVA. He won't touch us, mother; he won't touch us. . . . God will defend us. . . .

MERIK. Good evening, good Christians! (*shrugs his shoulders*). They say nothing! You are not asleep, are you, you clumsy beggars? Why don't you speak?

YEFIMOVNA. Turn your wicked eyes! Turn away your devilish pride!

MERIK. Hold your tongue, you old hag! It wasn't devilish pride, I meant to greet your hard lot with kind words and friendliness! You are huddling like flies with the cold—I felt sorry for you and wanted to say a kind word, to comfort you in your wretchedness, and you turn away your ugly faces! Very well, I don't care! (*Goes up to* FEDYA.) Where do you come from?

FEDYA. I belong to these parts, from the Hamonyevsky brickyards.

MERIK. Get up!

FEDYA (*sitting up*). Well?

MERIK. Stand up! Get up altogether! I'm going to lie there. . . .

FEDYA. I say. . . . Is it your place?

MERIK. Yes. . . . Go and lie on the floor.

FEDYA. Get along. . . . I am not afraid of you. . . .

MERIK. You are a smart chap. . . . Come, get along, don't talk! You'll be sorry for it, silly fellow.

TIHON (*to* FEDYA). Don't cross him, lad. Never mind.

FEDYA. What right have you? You roll your eyes like a shark and think I am frightened! (*gathers up his belongings, goes and lies down on the floor*). The devil! (*lies down and covers his head*).

MERIK (*making his bed on the bench*). You can't have seen the devil if you call me one. The devils are not like me (*lies down and lays his axe beside him*). Lie there, axe, my boy! Let me cover up your handle. I stole it . . . and now I fuss over it like a fool over a toy: I am sorry to throw it away and have nowhere to put it. Like a wife one is sick of. . . . Yes . . . (*covers himself over*). The devils aren't like me, lad. . . .

FEDYA (*poking his head out from under his coat*). What are they like then?

MERIK. They are like a vapour, a spirit. . . . Here you blow (*he blows*), they are like that. You can't see them.

A VOICE (*from the corner*). If you sit under a harrow, then you will see them.

MERIK. I've sat under one and I didn't see them. . . . The women talk nonsense . . . and so do silly peasants. . . . You won't see a devil nor a wood-goblin nor a ghost. . . . Our eyes

aren't made to see everything. . . . When I was little I used to go on purpose into the woods at night to see the wood-goblin. . . . I'd shout and shout my loudest, I'd call the wood-goblin and not blink an eye. I seemed to see all sorts of nonsense, but I didn't see the wood-goblin. I used to go to the churchyard at night, I wanted to see a ghost—it's all old women's tales. I've seen all sorts of wild beasts, but as for anything terrible—it's all fiddlesticks. The eye is not made for that. . . .

A VOICE (*from the corner*). Don't say that, it sometimes happens that one does see things. . . . In our village a peasant was cutting up a pig . . . he cut open its belly and something jumped out!

SAVVA (*sitting up*). Lads, don't speak of the evil one! It's a sin, my dears!

MERIK. Aha, the greybeard! The skeleton! (*laughs*). No need to go to the churchyard! Ghosts will creep up from the floor to preach to us. . . . A sin! . . . It's not for you to preach with your silly notions! You are an ignorant people, living in darkness . . . (*lights a pipe*). My father was a peasant, and he too was fond of preaching at times. One night he stole a sack of apples from the priest, brought it to us, and said "Mind, now, children, don't you touch an apple before the day of the blessing of apples in church, because it's a sin." It's just like you: one mustn't mention the devil, but one may play the devil. . . . For instance, take this hag here (*points to* YEFIMOVNA): she saw the evil one in me, but

I'll bet she has given her soul over to the devil half a dozen times in her day with her womanish follies. . . .

YEFIMOVNA. Ough, ough, ough! . . . The power of the Cross be with us! (*hides her face in her hands*). Savva, dear!

TIHON. Why are you scaring them? A nice way to amuse yourself! (*the door bangs with the wind*). Lord have mercy on us! What a wind!

MERIK (*stretches*). Oh, I should like to show my strength! (*The door bangs with the wind.*) To tussle with . . . that wind! He can't pull the door off, but I could pull the inn down, if I liked! (*gets up and lies down again*). I am so dreary!

NAZAROVNA. Say a prayer, you idol! What's the good of tossing about?

YEFIMOVNA. Don't touch him, bother him! He's looking at us again! (*To* MERIK) Don't look at us, wicked man! His eyes! . . . His eyes are like the devil's before matins!

SAVVA. Let him look, pilgrim women! Say a prayer, and an evil eye cannot touch you. . . .

BORTSOV. No, I can't bear it. It's too much! (*goes up to the counter*). I say, Tihon, for the last time I beg you. . . . Half a glass!

TIHON (*shakes his head*). Cash!

BORTSOV. My God, but I've told you already! Everything has gone on drink! Where can I get it for you? And surely it won't ruin you to give me a drop of vodka on credit? A glass of vodka costs you a copper, but it will save me from agony. I'm in agony! It's not a whim: it's agony! Do understand!

TIHON. Go and tell that to somebody else, not to me. . . . Go and ask the good people here; let them treat you, for Christ's sake, if they want to, but I only give bread in charity.

BORTSOV. You may fleece them, poor things! But I—no thank you. It's not for me to rob them! Not for me! Do you understand that? (*bangs the counter with his fist*). It's not for me! (*a pause*). Hm! . . . Wait a minute . . . (*turning to the pilgrims*). But that's an idea! Good people, will you give me a copper? My inside craves it. I'm ill!

FEDYA. Anything else . . . you rascal? . . . You don't care for water, I suppose?

BORTSOV. How I degrade myself! How I degrade myself! I don't want it! I don't want anything. . . . I was joking!

MERIK. You won't get it out of him, master. . . . We all know he is a skinflint. . . . Wait a bit! I've a copper somewhere about. . . . We'll have a glass between us . . . (*fumbles in his pockets*). Damn it! . . . Have I lost it somewhere? I thought I heard a jingling in my pocket the other day. . . . No, I've nothing. . . . I've nothing, friend! It's your ill-luck! (*a pause*).

BORTSOV. I must have a drink, or I shall do something violent, or commit suicide! . . My God! what am I to do? (*looks towards the door*). Shall I go? Go out into the darkness and go where chance takes me. . . .

MERIK. Why don't you preach him a sermon, you pilgrim women? And you, Tihon, why don't

you turn him out? He has not paid you for his night's lodging, has he? Turn him out, give him a shove! Ah, people are cruel nowadays! There is no softness and kindness in them. . . . People are brutal. A man is drowning, and they shout to him, "Make haste and sink; we have no time to look at you—it's a working day." As for throwing him a rope!—there's no chance of that. . . . A rope costs money. . . .

SAVVA. Do not judge, good man!

MERIK. Hold your tongue, you old wolf! You are a cruel people! Herods! Judases! (*To* TIHON) Come here! Take off my boots! Look sharp!

TIHON. I say, isn't he going it? (*laughs*). You are a terror!

MERIK. Come here, I tell you! Look sharp! (*a pause*). Do you hear? Am I speaking to the walls? (*gets up*).

TIHON. Come, come! . . . That's enough!

MERIK. I want you, you bloodsucker, to take my boots off, though I am a tramp and a beggar.

TIHON. Come, come! . . . Don't be cross! Come and have a glass. . . . Come and have a drink!

MERIK. Good people, what is it I want? That he should treat me to vodka, or that he should take off my boots? Didn't I speak plainly? Didn't I say right? (*To* TIHON) I suppose you did not hear me? I'll wait a minute. Perhaps you will hear.

(*There is some perturbation among the* PILGRIMS *and* WAYFARERS. *They get up and look at* TIHON *and* MERIK *in silent expectation.*)

TIHON. It's an ill wind brought you! (*comes out from behind the counter*). A fine gentleman, indeed! Here, where are they? (*pulls off* MERIK'S *boots*). You brood of Cain! . . .

MERIK. That's it. Put them side by side. . . . That's right. . . . You can go!

TIHON (*after taking off* MERIK'S *boots goes back to the counter*). You are too fond of swank. Give me any more of your swank, and you will be flying out of the door pretty quick! Yes! (*to* BORTSOV, *who is approaching*). You at it again?

BORTSOV. You see, I could perhaps give you a thing of value. . . . If you like, I will . . .

TIHON. Why are you shaking? Speak plainly!

BORTSOV. It's mean and nasty of me, but there's no help for it. I am not responsible for doing it. . . . I should be acquitted if I were tried for it. . . . Take it, only on condition that you let me redeem it when I am on my way back from the town. I give it you before witnesses. . . . Friends, you'll be witnesses (*takes a gold locket out of his breast pocket*). Here it is. . . . I ought to take the portrait out, but I have nowhere to put it: I am soaked through. . . . Well, take it with the portrait. Only, mind you . . . don't put your fingers on the face. Please . . . I was rude to you, my dear man. . . . I was stupid, but you must forgive me, and . . . don't finger it. . . . I don't want your eyes looking at it . . . (*gives* TIHON *the locket*).

TIHON (*examines the locket*). A stolen watch! Well, all right! Here is a drink (*pours out vodka*) . . . Gulp it down. . . .

BORTSOV. Only don't you finger it . . . (*drinks slowly, with spasmodic pauses*).

TIHON (*opens the locket*). Hm ! . . . a madam. . . . Where did you get hold of her ?

MERIK. Show me ! (*gets up and goes to the counter*). Let me have a look !

TIHON (*pushes away his hand*). Where are you shoving to ? Look while I hold it !

FEDYA (*gets up and goes to* TIHON). Let me have a look too !

(PILGRIMS *and* WAYFARERS *come round the counter, forming a group.*).

MERIK (*holds* TIHON'S *hand with the locket firmly in both of his hands, and looks at the portrait without speaking. A pause*). A handsome she-devil ! . . . A lady ! . . .

FEDYA. A lady ! . . . You can see from the cheeks and the eyes. . . . Take your hand away ; I can't see. Hair down to her waist. . . . For all the world as though she were alive ! She is just going to speak (*a pause*). . . .

MERIK. There's no surer ruin for a weak man. Once you are saddled with a woman like that . . . (*waves his hand*) that's the end of you !

(*Voice of* KUZMA : *" Wo-o-o ! Stop, you deaf beasts ! " Enter* KUZMA.)

KUZMA (*coming in*). If there's an inn by the wayside, there is no passing it. You might pass your own father in daylight without seeing him, but you see an inn a hundred miles off in the dark. Make way, if you are good Christians ! Hey, there ! (*taps with a copper on the counter*). A glass of real Madeira ! Look sharp !

FEDYA. He is a brisk devil!

TIHON. Don't wave your arms! You'll knock something over!

KUZMA. That's what we have them for, to wave. You are afraid of the rain, you softies! You are made of sugar, I suppose! (*drinks*).

YEFIMOVNA. One might well be afraid, good man, when one is overtaken by a night like this on the road. Now, thank God! we are well off. There are plenty of villages and houses on the roads; one can find shelter from the weather. But it's awful to think what it was in old days. You might walk for a hundred miles and not see a chip of wood, let alone a house or a village. You had to sleep on the ground. . . .

KUZMA. Have you been knocking about in the world so long, old girl?

YEFIMOVNA. Getting on for eighty years.

KUZMA. Eighty years! You'll soon be as old as a raven. (*Looking at* BORTSOV) And what sort of queer fish is this? (*Looks steadily at* BORTSOV) Master!

(BORTSOV *recognises* KUZMA *and, overwhelmed with confusion, retires into a corner and sits down on a bench.*)

KUZMA. Semyon Sergeyevitch! Can it be you? Eh? How on earth did you come into this pothouse? This isn't a place for you!

BORTSOV. Hold your tongue!

MERIK (*to* KUZMA). Who is he?

KUZMA. An unhappy martyr! (*walks nervously up and down by the counter*). In a pothouse? Well, I never! In rags! Drunk! It's upset

me, friends . . . it's upset me. (*To* MERIK *in a half-whisper*) It's our master, our landowner, Semyon Sergeyevitch, Mr. Bortsov. . . . You see what a state he is in? What does he look like now? See what drunkenness can bring a man to! . . . Fill my glass (*drinks*). I'm from his village, Bortsovka—maybe you've heard of it—a hundred and fifty miles from here in the Yergovsky district. We were his father's serfs. . . . It's a pity!

MERIK. Was he rich?

KUZMA. A great man. . . .

MERIK. Frittered away his father's money?

KUZMA. No; it was his fate, my dear soul. . . . He was a grand gentleman, rich and sober. . . . (*To* TIHON) I bet you used to see him yourself sometimes, driving by on his way to the town. Fine, spirited horses, and a carriage with springs—all first class! He used to keep five troikas, my lad. . . . Five years ago, I remember, he drove by the Mikishkinsky ferry, and instead of a copper flung down a rouble. . . . "I haven't time to wait for change," says he. . . . There!

MERIK. He went out of his mind, I suppose?

KUZMA. He seems to have all his senses about him. . . . It all came from want of spirit. Softness! In the first place, lads, it was on account of a woman. . . . He fell in love, poor fellow, with a lady from the town, and fancied that there was nothing lovelier in the world. . . . Fall in love with a crow, and she is finer than a falcon! She was a girl of good family. . . . Not one of these low-class women or anything in that way, but just . . . giddy . . . trailing her petticoats

and making eyes! And always laughing and laughing! No sense. . . . The gentry like that; they think it's clever. But we peasants would have turned a giddy-pate like that out of the house. . . . Well . . . he fell in love with her . . . and it was all up with him. He began dancing attendance on her, this and that, tea and sugar. . . . They'd be out all night in a boat, or playing the piano. . . .

BORTSOV. Don't talk of it, Kuzma. What's the use? What have they to do with my life?

KUZMA. Excuse me, your honour, I haven't said much. . . . I've just told them, and that's all. . . . I couldn't help speaking, because I was upset. . . . I was dreadfully upset! Fill up my glass (*drinks*).

MERIK (*in a half-whisper*). And did she love him?

KUZMA (*in a whisper, which gradually passes into ordinary talk*). I should think she did! He wasn't a gentleman of no consequence. . . . You may well love anyone who's got three thousand acres and more money than he can count. . . . And he was dignified, stately, sober. . . . He used to shake hands with all the government people, just like you and me now . . . (*takes* MERIK'S *hand*), with "Good-day" and "Good-bye," and "You are very welcome." . . . Well, I was walking one evening through the garden. . . . There were miles of garden! I was going along quietly, and I saw them sitting on a garden-seat and kissing each other (*makes sound of a kiss*). He gave her one, and she—the serpent!—gave him

two. . . . He took her white hand, and she flushed up and squeezed up to him, damn her! "I love you, Senya!" said she. . . . And Senya, as though he were crazed, rushed about and boasted of his joy in his foolishness, with a rouble to one and two to another. . . . He gave me enough for a horse. . . . He forgave all his debtors in his joy. . . .

BORTSOV. Oh, why go on telling? These people have no feeling. . . . It's painful, you know!

KUZMA. I've not said much, sir! They keep asking. Why not tell them a little? There, there! I won't if you are angry. . . . I won't. I'll take no notice of them.

(*There is the sound of the* POSTMAN'S *bells.*)

FEDYA. Don't shout! Speak quietly. . . .

KUZMA. I am speaking quietly. . . . He says I mustn't, so there's nothing to be done. . . . And indeed there is nothing more to tell. They were married, that was all. . . . There was nothing more. . . . Fill my glass (*drinks*). I don't like drunkenness! Just when the gentlefolk were to sit down to supper after the wedding, she takes and runs off in a carriage . . . (*in a whisper*). To the town, to a lawyer who was her lover. . . . Eh, what do you say to that? Just that very moment! . . . Why, killing's too good for her!

MERIK (*dreamily*). Well . . . what happened to him?

KUZMA. Went crazy. . . . As you see, he began by taking a drop, and now it's come to

buckets. . . First a drop, then buckets. . . . And still he loves her. There you are: he loves her! He must be on his way now to the town to try and get a peep at her . . . to get a peep and back again. . . .

(*The mail-cart drives up to the inn. The* POSTMAN *comes in and drinks.*)

TIHON. The post's late to-day.

(*The* POSTMAN *pays without speaking and goes out. The mail-cart drives away with the jingle of bells.*)

A VOICE (*from the corner*). This is the weather for robbing the post. It would be nothing to do.

MERIK. I've lived thirty-five years in the world and never once robbed the post (*a pause*). . . . Now it's gone. . . . It's too late . . . it's too late. . . .

KUZMA. Want a sniff of prison?

MERIK. Plenty of folk rob without getting a sniff. And what if it did come to prison? (*Abruptly*) And what then?

KUZMA. You mean about the poor gentleman?

MERIK. Why, whom else?

KUZMA. The next thing is how he came to ruin . . . it was his brother-in-law . . . his sister's husband. . . He took it into his head to stand security for his brother-in-law with a bank . . . for thirty thousand or so. . . . The brother-in-law was fond of borrowing . . . he knew which side his bread was buttered and never turned a hair, the swine. . . . Borrowed, but did not trouble to pay back. . . . So our master had to pay the whole thirty thousand (*sighs*). A foolish

man has to suffer for his foolishness. His wife has children by the lawyer and his brother-in-law has bought an estate near Poltava. Our master like a fool hangs about in pothouses complaining to peasants like us. "I've lost my faith, lads! There's nothing I can believe in now!" Weak-heartedness I call it! Every man has his sorrow, some snake gnawing at his heart, but that's no reason for drinking. Take the elder in our village, now. His wife is openly carrying on with the schoolmaster, spends her husband's money on drink, and the elder goes about with a scornful grin. . . . He's gone a bit thin in the face though. . . .

TIHON (*sighs*). Men bear their troubles as God gives them strength.

KUZMA. Everyone hasn't the same strength, that's true enough. . . . Well, how much is it? (*Pays*) There, take my hard-earned wages! Good-bye, lads! Good night to you and pleasant dreams! I must run, it's late. . . . I am fetching the midwife for my mistress from the hospital. . . . I expect she's tired of waiting and wet through, poor dear . . . (*runs out*).

TIHON (*after a pause*). Hi you! What's your name! Have a drink, poor fellow! (*fills his glass*).

BORTSOV (*comes up to the counter irresolutely and drinks*). So now I owe you for two glasses.

TIHON. That's nothing. Drink. Drown your grief in ruin!

FEDYA. Have a glass from me too! Ough! (*throws a copper on the counter*). You'll die if you drink, and die if you don't. It's a good thing not

to drink, but by God, vodka frees the heart! Even grief's not grief when you're drunk. . . . Swill it up!

BORTSOV. Foo! it's hot!

MERIK. Give it here! (*takes the locket from* TIHON *and looks at the portrait*). Hm. . . . Ran off on her wedding day. . . . What a woman!

A VOICE (*from the corner*). Pour him out a glass on my account, too, Tihon!

MERIK (*flings the locket violently on the ground*). Damn her! (*goes quickly to his place and lies down with his face to the wall*).

(*Sensation.*)

BORTSOV. How's this? What's the meaning of that? (*picks up the locket*). How dare you, you beast? What right have you? (*tearfully*). You want me to kill you, do you? You ignorant peasant!

TIHON. Don't be angry, master. . . . It's not made of glass, it's not broken. . . . Have another glass and then go to sleep (*fills another glass*). I've been listening to you here and it's time to shut the inn (*goes and shuts outer door*).

BORTSOV (*drinks*). How dare he? What a fool! (*To* MERIK). Do you know that you are a fool, an ass?

SAVVA. Good friends! Put a curb on your tongues! What's the use of making a row? Let folks sleep!

TIHON. Lie down, lie down. . . . That's enough! (*goes behind the counter and locks the till*). It's bedtime.

FEDYA. It is! (*lies down*). Good night, friends!

MERIK (*gets up and spreads his coat on the bench*). Come, master, lie here.

TIHON. Where are you going to lie, then?

MERIK. Anywhere . . . on the floor . . . (*spreads jerkin on the floor*). It's all one to me (*lays the axe beside him*). It would be misery for him to sleep on the floor. . . . He's used to silks and down. . . .

TIHON (*to* BORTSOV). Lie down, your honour! You've looked at the portrait long enough (*puts out the candle*). Give her up!

BORTSOV (*staggering*). Where am I to lie?

TIHON. In the tramp's place! Didn't you hear? He's offered it to you.

BORTSOV (*goes to the bench*). I'm . . . I'm . . . drunk. . . . This . . . this it? . . . Am I to lie here? . . .

TIHON. Yes, yes, don't be afraid, lie down . . . (*stretches himself on the counter*).

BORTSOV (*lies down*). I'm . . . drunk. . . . Everything is going round . . . (*opens the locket*). Haven't you a bit of candle? (*a pause*). You're a queer girl, Masha. . . . You look at me out of the frame and laugh . . . (*laughs*). Drunk! You oughtn't to laugh at a drunken man! You disregard everything, as Schastlivtsev says . . . and love a drunken man. . . .

FEDYA. How the wind howls! It's terrifying.

BORTSOV (*laughs*). What a girl you are . . . How can you go whirling round like that? There's no catching you!

MERIK. He's wandering. He keeps looking at the portrait (*laughs*). It's a queer start! These

learned gentry have invented machines and medicines of all sorts, and yet no one has been clever enough to find a cure against the female sex. . . . They try to find how to cure every sort of disease, and they never seem to have a notion that more are ruined by womenfolk than by any disease. . . . Sly, money-loving, no mercy and no sense. . . . The old women lead their sons' wives an awful life, the wives think of nothing but how to deceive their husbands. . . . And there's no end to it!

TIHON. The women have pulled the cock's comb and now he is ruffling up his feathers.

MERIK. I am not the only one. . . . From time immemorial, as long as there has been a world, men have been weeping. . . . It's not for nothing that in all the tales and songs woman is reckoned with the devil. . . . It's not for nothing! It's more than half true anyway (*a pause*). . . . Here's this gentleman playing the fool, and it's not through wisdom that I've turned tramp, left my mother and father. . . .

FEDYA. Was it women?

MERIK. Just the same as the gentleman here. I went about like one possessed, bewitched. Boasted of my happiness. . . . Day and night as though on fire, but the time came when my eyes were opened. . . . It wasn't love, but only a cheat. . . .

FEDYA. What did you do to her?

MERIK. That's not your business . . . (*a pause*). Killed her, do you suppose? My hand failed. . . . One doesn't kill them. . . . One even

feels for them. . . . Live and be . . . happy! If only you are not before my eyes and I can forget you, snake in the grass! (*a knock at the door*).

TIHON. Who the devil's there? Who is it? (*a knock*). Who's knocking? (*gets up and goes to the door*). Who's knocking? You must go on! We're shut!

VOICE (*at door*). Let me in, Tihon, for goodness' sake! A spring's broken in the carriage! Help me, be a father to me! If only we had a bit of cord to tie it up, then somehow we could get home . . . .

TIHON. Who is it?

VOICE (*at door*). My lady's driving from town to Varsonofyevo. . . . We've only four miles to go! Help me, for goodness' sake!

TIHON. Tell your lady if she gives us ten roubles there will be a cord, and we'll mend the spring. . . .

VOICE (*at door*). Are you crazy? Ten roubles! You mad dog, you are glad of other people's troubles.

TIHON. You know best. . . . You needn't give it if you don't want to. . . .

VOICE (*at door*). Well, all right then, wait a bit (*pause*). My lady says, very good.

TIHON. Walk in then! (*opens the door and admits* DENIS).

DENIS. Good evening, good Christian people! Here, give me the rope! Make haste! Lads, who'll come out and help? There'll be something for you!

TIHON. No need of anything. . . . Let them sleep. We'll manage it together!

DENIS. Ough! I'm regular worn out! Cold,

muddy, not a dry thread on me. . . . Another thing, my good man. . . . Haven't you a little room here where my lady can get warm? The carriage is all on one side, there's no sitting in it. . . .

TIHON. She wants a room, too? Let her get warm here if she's cold . . . we'll find room for her! (*goes up to* BORTSOV *and clears a space*). Get up, get up! You can lie just for one hour on the floor while the lady's getting warm. (*To* BORTSOV) Get up, your honour! Sit up a bit! (BORTSOV *sits up.*) Here's a place for you!

(DENIS *goes out.*)

FEDYA. Here's a visitor now, plague take her! Now there'll be no sleeping till morning.

TIHON. It's a pity I didn't ask fifteen. . . . She'd have given it (*stands before the door in expectant attitude*). . . . And you must be on your best behaviour, all of you. . . . No rude words now. . . .

(*Enter* MARYA YEGOROVNA, *followed by* DENIS. TIHON *bows.*)

TIHON. Pray walk in, your Excellency! Our poor abode, only fit for peasants and blackbeetles. . . . Don't disdain it!

MARYA YEGOROVNA. I can't see anything . . . where am I to go?

TIHON. This way, your Excellency (*leads her to seat beside* BORTSOV). Pray come this way! (*blows on the seat*). You must excuse me, I've no room apart. But don't you be uneasy, madam: they are good, quiet folks. . . .

MARYA YEGOROVNA (*sits down beside* BORTSOV)

How fearfully stuffy! You might at least open the door!

TIHON. Yes, madam! (*runs and opens the door wide*).

MERIK. People are cold and they open the doors (*gets up and slams the door*). Who's she to give orders? (*lies down*).

TIHON. You must excuse it, your Excellency, he's a simpleton . . . a bit cracked. . . . But don't be frightened. . . . He won't hurt you. . . . Only excuse me, lady, I didn't agree for ten roubles . . . for fifteen if you like.

MARYA YEGOROVNA. Very well, only make haste.

TIHON. This minute; we'll do it in a twinkling . . . (*hauls out rope from under counter*). This minute . . . (*a pause*).

BORTSOV (*looks intently at* MARYA YEGOROVNA). Marie . . . Masha. . . .

MARYA YEGOROVNA (*looking at* BORTSOV). What next?

BORTSOV. Marie . . . is it you? Where have you come from?

(MARYA YEGOROVNA, *recognising* BORTSOV, *utters a shriek and dashes away from him into the middle of the room.*)

BORTSOV (*follows her*). Marie . . . it's me . . . it's me . . . (*laughs*). My wife! Marie! But where am I? Somebody, light a candle!

MARYA YEGOROVNA. Go away! You are lying! It's not you! It's impossible! (*hides her face in her hands*). It's a lie! It's silly!

BORTSOV. Her voice, her movements . . . Marie, it's me! I shan't be . . . drunk . . . in

a minute. . . . My head's going round. . . . My God! Wait a bit . . . wait a bit. . . . I can't understand (*cries out aloud*). Wife! (*falls at her feet and sobs*).

(*A group forms round the husband and wife.*)

MARYA YEGOROVNA. Go away! (*To* DENIS) Denis, let us go! I can't stay here!

MERIK (*leaps up and looks intently into her face*). The portrait! (*clutches her arm*). It's the same! Hey, folks! The gentleman's wife!

MARYA YEGOROVNA. Hands off, peasant! (*tries to pull her arm away*). Denis, what are you waiting for? (DENIS *and* TIHON *run up to her and seize* MERIK *under the arms*). This is a robbers' den! Let go my arm! I am not afraid of you! . . . Go away!

MERIK. Stop a bit, I'll let you go directly. Only let me say something to you. . . . One thing, so you may understand. . . . Wait a bit . . . (*turns to* TIHON *and* DENIS). Keep off, you louts, don't hold me! I won't let her go till I've told her something. Wait a bit . . . in a minute (*strikes his forehead with his fist*). No, God has given me no sense! I can't think of the word to say to you!

MARYA YEGOROVNA (*pulls away her arm*). Go away! They are drunk. . . . Let us go, Denis! (*tries to move towards door*).

MERIK (*bars the way*). Come, you might give him just one look! Comfort him with one kind word! For God's sake!

MARYA YEGOROVNA. Take this . . . crazy man away from me.

MERIK. Then go to the devil, you damned woman! (*swings the axe*).

(*Terrible commotion. They all leap up with noise and outcries of horror.* SAVVA *stands between* MARYA YEGOROVNA *and* MERIK. DENIS *violently pulls* MERIK *away and carries his lady out of the inn. After this all stand rooted to the spot. A prolonged pause.*)

BORTSOV. (*clutches at the air with his hands*). Marie. . . . Where are you, Marie?

NAZAROVNA. Oh dear, oh dear. . . . You've wrung my heart, you murderers. And what a fearful night!

MERIK (*dropping the hand which holds the axe*). Have I killed her?

TIHON. Thank God, your life's safe this time. . . .

MERIK. I didn't kill her then . . . (*goes staggering to his place*). It was not my luck to die from a stolen axe . . . (*sinks down on his coat and sobs*). Oh, misery! cruel misery! Have pity on me, good Christians!

CURTAIN.

THE WEDDING

A FARCE IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

YEVDOKIM ZAHAROVITCH ZHIGALOV (*retired Collegiate registry-clerk*).
NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA (*his wife*).
DASHENKA (*their daughter*).
EPAMINOND MAXIMOVITCH APLOMBOV (*her bridegroom*).
FYODOR YAKOVLEVITCH REVUNOV-KARAULOV (*retired Naval Captain of the second rank*).
ANDREY ANDREYEVITCH NYUNIN (*Insurance Agent*).
ANNA MARTYNOVNA ZMEYUKIN (*a Midwife, about thirty, in a bright magenta dress*).
IVAN MIHAILOVITCH YAT (*a Telegraph Clerk*).
HARLAMPY SPIRIDONOVITCH DYMBA (*a Greek keeper of a confectioner's shop*).
DMITRY STEPANOVITCH MOZGOVOY (*a Sailor in the Volunteer fleet*).
BEST MEN, DANCING GENTLEMEN, WAITERS, *etc.*

The action takes place in one of the rooms of a second-class restaurant.

THE WEDDING

A FARCE IN ONE ACT

A brilliantly lighted room. A big table laid for supper. WAITERS *in swallow-tails are busy at the tables. Behind the scenes a band is playing the last figure of the quadrille.*

MADAME ZMEYUKIN, YAT, *and the Bridegroom's* BEST MAN *walk across the stage.*

MADAME ZMEYUKIN. No, no, no!

YAT (*following her*). Have pity on me!

MADAME ZMEYUKIN. No, no, no!

THE BEST MAN (*hastening after them*). I say, you can't go on like that! Where are you off to? And the *Grand-rond? Grand-rond,* silvoo-play! (*They go out*).

(*Enter* NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA *and* APLOMBOV.)

NASTASYA. Instead of worrying me, saying all sorts of things, you had much better go and dance.

APLOMBOV. I am not a Spinoza, to go twirling my legs like a top. I am a practical man and a man of character, and I find no entertainment in idle diversions. But dancing is not what I am talking about. Forgive me, *maman,* but there's a great deal I can't make out in your conduct. For instance, apart from objects of household utility.

you promised to give me two lottery tickets with your daughter. Where are they?

NASTASYA. I've got a shocking headache. . . . It must be the weather. . . . There's going to be a thaw!

APLOMBOV. Don't try to put me off. I found out to-day that your tickets are pawned. Excuse me, *maman*, no one but an exploiter would do a thing like that. I don't say this from egoisticism —I don't want your lottery tickets—but it's a matter of principle, and I won't allow anyone to do me. I've made your daughter's happiness, and if you don't give me the tickets to-day, I'll make it hot for her! I am a man of honour!

NASTASYA (*looking round the table and counting the places laid*). One, two, three, four, five . . .

A WAITER. The cook told me to ask you how you will have the ices served: with rum, with Madeira, or with nothing.

APLOMBOV. With rum. And tell the manager there is not enough wine. Tell him to send some Haut-Sauterne as well. (*To* NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA) You promised, too, and it was an agreed thing, that at supper to-night there should be a general. And where is he, I should like to know?

NASTASYA. That's not my fault, my dear.

APLOMBOV. Whose, then?

NASTASYA. Andrey Andreyevitch's. He was here yesterday and promised to bring a real general (*sighs*). I suppose he could not find one anywhere, or he would have brought him. As though we were mean about it! There's nothing

we'd grudge for our child's happiness. A general, by all means, if you want one. . . .

APLOMBOV. And another thing. . . . Everybody knows, and so do you, *maman*, that that telegraph clerk Yat was courting Dashenka before I made her an offer. Why have you invited him? Surely you must have known I should dislike it?

NASTASYA. Oh, what's your name? Epaminond Maximitch, here you have not been married one day, and already you've worn me out, and Dashenka too, with your talk. And what will it be in a year? You are a trying man, you really are!

APLOMBOV. You don't like to hear the truth? A-ha! So that's how it is. But you should behave honourably. All I want of you is to be honourable!

(*Couples dancing the Grand-rond come in at one door, cross the stage, and go out at another. The first couple are* DASHENKA *and the* BEST MAN, *the last* YAT *and* MADAME ZMEYUKIN. *The last couple drop behind and remain in the room.* ZHIGALOV *and* DYMBA *enter and go up to the table.*)

THE BEST MAN (*shouts*). Promenade! Messieurs, promenade! (*Behind the scenes*) Promenade!

(*The couples dance out.*)

YAT (*to* MADAME ZMEYUKIN). Have pity, have pity, enchanting Anna Martynovna!

MADAME ZMEYUKIN. Oh, what a man! . . . I have told you already that I am not in voice to-day.

YAT. I entreat you, do sing! If it's only one note! Have pity! If only one note!

MADAME ZMEYUKIN. You worry me . . . (*sits down and waves her fan*).

YAT. Yes, you really are pitiless! To think of such a cruel creature, if I may use the expression, having such a lovely voice! With such a voice you oughtn't to be a midwife, if you'll allow me to say so, but to sing at public concerts! How divine is your rendering of this phrase, for instance . . . this one . . . (*hums*) . . . "I loved you, love that was in vain" . . . Exquisite!

MADAME ZMEYUKIN (*hums*). "I loved you, and still it may be love" . . . Is that it?

YAT. Yes, that's it. Exquisite!

MADAME ZMEYUKIN. No, I am not in voice to-day. . . . There, fan me . . . it's hot! (*To* APLOMBOV) Epaminond Maximitch, why are you so melancholy? That's not the thing on your wedding day! You ought to be ashamed, you horrid man! Why, what are you thinking about?

APLOMBOV. Marriage is a serious step. It needs serious consideration from every point of view.

MADAME ZMEYUKIN. What hateful sceptics you all are! I cannot breathe in your society. . . . Give me atmosphere! Do you hear? Give me atmosphere! (*hums*).

YAT. Exquisite! exquisite!

MADAME ZMEYUKIN. Fan me, fan me! I feel as though my heart were going to burst. . . . Tell me, please, why is it I feel suffocated?

YAT. It's because you are in a sweat. . . .

MADAME ZMEYUKIN. Ough, what vulgarity! Don't dare to use such expressions!

YAT. I beg your pardon! Of course you are

used to aristocratic society, if you'll excuse the expression. . . .

MADAME ZMEYUKIN. Oh, let me alone! Give me poetry, raptures! Fan me, fan me! . . .

ZHIGALOV (*to* DYMBA). Shall we repeat? (*fills glasses*). One can drink at any minute. The great thing is not to neglect one's business, Harlampy Spiridonitch. Drink, but keep your wits about you! . . . But as for drinking, why not drink? There's no harm in a drink. . . . To your good health! (*They drink.*) And are there tigers in Greece?

DYMBA. Dere are.

ZHIGALOV. And lions?

DYMBA. Yes, lions too. In Russia dere's noding, but in Greece dere's everyding. Dere I have fader, and uncle, and broders, and here I have noding.

ZHIGALOV. Hm. . . . And are there whales in Greece?

DYMBA. Dere's everyding.

NASTASYA (*to her husband*). Why are you eating and drinking all anyhow? It's time for everyone to sit down. Don't stick your fork into the tinned lobster. . . . That's for the general. Perhaps he may come yet. . . .

ZHIGALOV. And are there lobsters in Greece, too?

DYMBA. Yes . . . dere's everyding dere.

ZHIGALOV. Hm. . . . And collegiate registry clerks too?

MADAME ZMEYUKIN. I can imagine what the atmosphere is in Greece!

ZHIGALOV. And I expect there's a lot of

roguery. . . . Greeks are much the same as Armenians or gypsies. They sell you a sponge or a goldfish, and are all agog to fleece you over it. Shall we repeat ?

NASTASYA. What's the good of repeating ? It's time we were all sitting down. It's past eleven. . . .

ZHIGALOV. Well, let us sit down, then. Ladies and gentlemen, pray come to supper ! (*Shouts*) Supper ! Young people !

NASTASYA. Dear friends, please come ! Sit down !

MADAME ZMEYUKIN (*sitting down at the table*). Give me poetry ! " His restless spirit seeks the storm as though in tempest there were peace ! " Give me tempest !

YAT (*aside*). A remarkable woman ! I am in love ! head over ears in love !

(*Enter* DASHENKA, MOZGOVOY, *the* BEST MAN, *gentlemen and ladies. They all sit down noisily ; a moment's pause ; the band plays a march.*)

MOZGOVOY (*getting up*). Ladies and gentlemen, I have something to say. . . . We have a great many toasts to drink and speeches to make. Don't let us put them off, but begin at once. Ladies and gentlemen, I propose the toast of the bride and bridegroom !

(*The band plays a flourish. Shouts of " Hurrah ! " and clinking of glasses.*)

MOZGOVOY. It needs sweetening !

ALL. It needs sweetening !

(APLOMBOV *and* DASHENKA *kiss.*)

YAT. Exquisite! exquisite! I must declare, ladies and gentlemen—and it's only paying credit where credit is due—that this room and the establishment generally is magnificent! Superb, enchanting! But, you know, there's one thing wanting to complete it: electric lighting, if you will excuse the expression! In all countries they have electric light now, and only Russia lags behind.

ZHIGALOV (*with an air of profundity*). Electric light. . . . Hm. . . . But to my mind electric light is nothing but roguery. . . . They stick a bit of coal in, and think they will hoax you with that! No, my good man, if you are going to give us light, don't give us a little bit of coal, but give us something substantial, something solid that you can get hold of! Give us light —you understand—light that's natural and not intellectual!

YAT. If you had seen an electric battery, and what it's made of, you'd think differently.

ZHIGALOV. I don't want to see it. It's roguery. They take simple folks in. . . . Squeeze the last drop out of them. . . . We know all about them. . . . Instead of sticking up for roguery, young man, you had better have a drink and fill other people's glasses. Yes, indeed!

APLOMBOV. I quite agree with you, Pa. What's the use of trotting out these learned subjects? I am quite ready to talk of all sorts of discoveries in the scientific sense, but there's a time for everything! (*To* DASHENKA) What do you think about it, *ma chère*?

DASHENKA. He wants to show off his learning, and always talks of things no one can understand.

NASTASYA. Thank God, we have lived all our lives without learning, and this is the third daughter we are marrying to a good husband. And if you think we are so uneducated, why do you come to see us? You should go to your learned friends!

YAT. I've always had a respect for your family, Nastasya Timofeyevna, and if I did say a word about electric lighting, it doesn't mean I spoke out of conceit. I am ready enough to have a drink! I have always wished Darya Yevdokimovna a good husband with all the feelings of my heart. It's difficult to find a good husband nowadays, Nastasya Timofeyevna. Nowadays everybody is keen on marrying for money. . . .

APLOMBOV. That's a hint at me!

YAT (*scared*). Not the slightest hint intended. . . . I was not speaking of present company. . . . I meant it as a general remark. . . . Upon my word! Everyone knows you are marrying for love. . . . The dowry is not worth talking about!

NASTASYA. Not worth talking about, isn't it? You mind what you are saying, sir. Besides a thousand roubles in cash, we are giving three pelisses, the bedding and all the furniture. You try and find a dowry to match that!

YAT. I didn't mean anything. . . . The furniture is certainly nice . . . and . . . and the pelisses, of course; I only spoke in the sense that they're offended as though I'd dropped a hint.

NASTASYA. Well, you shouldn't drop hints. It's

out of regard for your parents we asked you to the wedding, and you keep saying all sorts of things. And if you knew that Epaminond Maximovitch was after her money, why didn't you speak before? (*Tearfully*) I have reared and nurtured her. . . . I've watched over her like a diamond or an emerald, my sweet child. . . .

APLOMBOV. And you believe him? Much obliged, I am sure! Very much obliged. (*To* YAT) And as for you, Mr. Yat, though you are a friend, I won't allow you to behave so disgracefully in other people's houses! Kindly take yourself off!

YAT. What do you mean?

APLOMBOV. I could wish you were as much of a gentleman as I am! In fact, kindly take yourself off.

(*The band plays a flourish.*)

GENTLEMEN (*to* APLOMBOV). Oh, stop it! Leave off! It doesn't matter! Sit down! Let him alone!

YAT. I wasn't saying anything . . . why, I . . . In fact, I don't understand it. . . . Certainly, I'll go. . . . But first pay me the five roubles you borrowed from me a year ago to buy yourself a pique waistcoat; excuse the expression. I'll have another drink and I'll . . . I'll go, only first pay me what you owe me.

GENTLEMEN. Come, stop it, stop it! That's enough! Making such a fuss about nothing!

THE BEST MAN (*shouts*). To the health of the bride's parents, Yevdokim Zaharitch and Nastasya Timofeyevna!

(*The band plays a flourish. Shouts of "Hurrah!"*)

ZHIGALOV (*touched, bows in all directions*). Thank you, good friends! I am very grateful to you for not forgetting us and not being too proud to come! . . . Don't think that I am a knave or that it's roguery. I speak merely as I feel! In the simplicity of my heart! For my friends I grudge nothing! I thank you sincerely! (*kisses those near him*).

DASHENKA (*to her mother*). Ma, why are you crying? I am so happy.

APLOMBOV. *Maman* is upset at the approaching separation. But I would advise her to think over our conversation.

YAT. Don't cry, Nastasya Timofeyevna! Think what human tears are! Neurotic weakness, that's all!

ZHIGALOV. And are there mushrooms in Greece?

DYMBA. Yes, dere is everyding dere.

ZHIGALOV. But, I bet, there are no brown ones, like ours.

DYMBA. Yes, dere are.

MOZGOVOY. Harlampy Spiridonitch, it's your turn to make a speech! Ladies and gentlemen, let him make a speech!

ALL. A speech! a speech! It's your turn.

DYMBA. Why? What for? I not understand what it is. . . .

MADAME ZMEYUKIN. No, no! Don't dare to refuse! It's your turn! Get up!

DYMBA (*stands up, in confusion*). I can say dis. . . . Dere's Russia and dere's Greece. Dere's

people in Russia and dere's people in Greece. . . . And *caravies* floating on de sea, dat is in Russian, ships, and on de earth de different railways. I know very well. . . . We Greeks, you Russians, and not want noding. I can tell you . . . dere's Russia and dere's Greece.

(*Enter* NYUNIN.)

NYUNIN. Stay, ladies and gentlemen, don't eat yet! Wait a bit! Nastasya Timofeyevna, one minute! Come this way! (*draws* NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA *aside, breathlessly*). I say, the general is just coming. . . . At last I've got hold of him. . . . I am simply worn out. . . . A real general, so dignified, elderly, eighty I should think, or perhaps ninety. . . .

NASTASYA. When is he coming?

NYUNIN. This minute! You will be grateful to me to the end of your days. Not a general but a peach, a Boulanger! Not a common general, not an infantry man, but a naval one! In grade he is a captain of the second rank, but in their reckoning, in the fleet, it's equal to a major-general, or, in the civil service, to an actual civil councillor. It's exactly the same; higher, in fact.

NASTASYA. You are not deceiving me, Andryushenka?

NYUNIN. What next! Am I a swindler? Set your mind at rest.

NASTASYA (*with a sigh*). I don't want to spend my money for nothing, Andryushenka. . . .

NYUNIN. Set your mind at rest! He is a perfect picture of a general! (*Raising his voice*)

I said to him: "You have quite forgotten us, your Excellency! It's too bad, your Excellency, to forget your old friends! Nastasya Timofeyevna," I said, "is quite huffy!" (*goes to the table and sits down*). And he said to me: "Upon my soul, my boy, how can I go when I don't know the bridegroom?" "What next, your Excellency! why stand on ceremony? The bridegroom is a splendid fellow, an open-hearted chap. He is a valuer in a pawnbroker's shop," I told him, "but don't imagine, your Excellency, that he is a paltry beggar or a cad. Even well-born ladies serve in pawnshops nowadays." He slapped me on the shoulder, we each had a Havana cigar, and here he is coming now. . . . Wait a minute, ladies and gentlemen, don't eat. . . .

APLOMBOV. And when will he be here?

NYUNIN. This minute. He was putting on his goloshes when I came away.

APLOMBOV. Then we must tell them to play a march.

NYUNIN (*shouts*). Hey, bandmaster! A march! (*The band plays a march for a minute.*)

A WAITER (*announces*). Mr. Revunov-Karaulov!

(ZHIGALOV, NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA, *and* NYUNIN *hasten to meet him. Enter* REVUNOV-KARAULOV.)

NASTASYA (*bowing*). You are very welcome, your Excellency! Delighted to see you!

REVUNOV. Delighted!

ZHIGALOV. We are not distinguished or wealthy people, your Excellency, we are plain folks; but

don't think there's any roguery on our part. We grudge nothing for nice people, nothing is too good for them. You are very welcome!

REVUNOV. Delighted!

NYUNIN. Allow me to introduce, your Excellency! The bridegroom Epaminond Maximitch Aplombov, with his new-born . . . I mean newly married bride! Ivan Mihailitch Yat, of the telegraph department. Harlampy Spiridonitch Dymba, a foreigner of Greek extraction, in the confectionery line! Osip Lukitch Babelmandebsky! And so on . . . and so on. . . . The rest are not much account. Sit down, your Excellency.

REVUNOV. Delighted! Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, I want to say a couple of words to Andryusha (*leads* NYUNIN *aside*). I feel rather awkward, my boy. . . . Why do you call me "your Excellency"? Why, I am not a general! A captain of the second rank; it isn't even as good as a colonel.

NYUNIN (*speaks into his ear as to a deaf man*). I know, but, Fyodor Yakovlevitch, be so good as to let us say "your Excellency"! They are a patriarchal family here, you know; they honour their betters, and like to show respect where respect is due. . . .

REVUNOV. Well, if that's how it is, of course . . . (*going to the table*). Delighted!

NASTASYA. Sit down, your Excellency! Do us the honour! What will you take, your Excellency? Only you must excuse us, you are accustomed to dainty fare at home, while we are plain people!

REVUNOV (*not hearing*). What? Hm. . . . Yes. . . . (*a pause*). Yes. . . . In old days people all lived plainly and were satisfied. I am a man of rank in the service, but I live plainly. . . . Andryusha came to me to-day and invited me here to the wedding. "How can I go," said I, "when I don't know them? That would be awkward!" But, he said, "They are plain people, a patriarchal family, always glad to see a visitor." "Oh well, of course if that is how it is . . . Why not? I am delighted. It's dull for me at home all alone, and if my being at the wedding can give pleasure to anyone, well, by all means," I said.

ZHIGALOV. So it was in the kindness of your heart, your Excellency? I honour you! I am a plain man, with no sort of roguery about me, and I respect those that are the same. Pray take something, your Excellency.

APLOMBOV. Have you long left the service, your Excellency?

REVUNOV. Eh? Yes, yes . . . to be sure. That's true. Yes. . . . But how is this? The herring is bitter and the bread is bitter, I can't eat it.

ALL. It needs sweetening!

(APLOMBOV *and* DASHENKA *kiss.*)

REVUNOV. He-he-he! . . . Your health! (*a pause*). Yes. . . . In old days everything was plain, and everyone was satisfied. . . . I like plain ways. . . . I am an old man. Of course, I retired from the service in 1865. I am seventy-two. . . . Yes. In old days to be sure, they

liked, too, on occasion to make a show, but . . (*seeing* MOZGOVOY). You . . . er . . . are a sailor, aren't you ?

MOZGOVOY. Yes, sir.

REVUNOV. Aha ! . . . To be sure. . . . Yes. . . . The naval service was always a hard one. You've something to think about and rack your brains over. Every trivial word has, so to say, a special meaning. For instance: Mast-hands, to the top-sail lifts and the mainsail braces ! What does that mean ? A sailor understands, no fear about that ! Ha-ha ! It's as hard as any mathematics.

NYUNIN. To the health of his Excellency, Fyodor Yakovlevitch Revunov-Karaulov !

(*Band plays a flourish.*)

ALL. Hurrah !

YAT. Well, your Excellency, you've just been pleased to tell us something about the difficulties of the naval service. But is the telegraph service any easier ? Nowadays, your Excellency, no one can go in for the telegraph service unless he can read and write French and German. But the hardest job for us is transmitting the telegrams ! It's awfully difficult ! Just listen (*taps with his fork on the table, imitating the telegraph code*).

REVUNOV. And what does that mean ?

YAT. That means : I respect you, your Excellency, for your noble qualities. Do you suppose that's easy ? And now listen (*taps*).

REVUNOV. A little louder. . . . I don't hear.

YAT. That means : Madam, how happy I am to hold you in my arms.

REVUNOV. What madam are you talking about? Yes . . . (*to* MOZGOVOY). And now if you are sailing with a strong wind and want to hoist the top-gallant sail and the royal, then you must shout: Sail hands, on the cross-trees to the top-gallant sail and the royal sail! . . . and while they pay out the sails on the yards below, they are at the top-gallant and royal halyards, stays and braces. . . .

THE BEST MAN (*getting up*). Ladies and gentle . . .

REVUNOV (*interrupting*). Yes . . . there are all sorts of orders to be given. . . . Yes. . . . Top-gallant sheets and royal sheets taut, let go the lifts! Sounds fine, doesn't it? But what does it mean? Oh, it's very simple. They pull the top-gallant and royal sheets and raise the lifts. . . . All at once! And at the same time as they raise them, level the royal sheets and the royal lifts, and, where necessary, slacken the braces of those sails, and when the sheets are taut and all the lifts have been raised to their places, the top-gallant braces and the royal braces are taut and the yards are turned the way of the wind. . . .

NYUNIN (*to* REVUNOV). Fyodor Yakovlevitch! our hostess begs you to talk of something else. Our guests can't understand this, they are bored. . . .

REVUNOV. What? Who is bored? (*to* MOZGOVOY). Young man! Now, if the ship is lying with the wind on the starboard tack, under full sail, and you want to bring her round before the wind, what order must you give? Why, pipe all hands on deck, bring her round before the wind.

NYUNIN. Fyodor Yakovlevitch, that's enough, eat your supper!

REVUNOV. As soon as they have all run up, you give the command at once: Stand to your places, bring her round before the wind! Ah, what a life! You give the command and see the sailors run like lightning to their places and pull the stays and the braces, then you can't help shouting, Bravo, lads! (*chokes and coughs*).

THE BEST MAN (*hastening to take advantage of the ensuing pause*). On this, so to speak, festive occasion, on which we, all gathered together here, to do honour to our beloved . . .

REVUNOV (*interrupting*). Yes! And you have to remember all that! For instance: let out the fore-top-sail-sheet, top-gallant-sail sheet! . . .

THE BEST MAN (*offended*). Why does he interrupt? At this rate we shan't get through a single speech!

NASTASYA. We are ignorant people, your Excellency, we don't understand a word of all this. If you would tell us something that would amuse . . .

REVUNOV (*not hearing*). Thank you, I have had some. Did you say goose? Thank you. . . . Yes. I was recalling old days. It's a jolly life, young man! You float over the sea without a care in your heart and . . . (*in a shaking voice*). Do you remember the excitement of tacking? What sailor isn't fired by the thought of that manœuvre! Why, as soon as the command is given: Pipe all hands on deck, it's like an electric shock running through them all. From the

commanding officer to the lowest sailor they are all in a flutter. . . .

MADAME ZMEYUKIN. I am bored, I am bored! (*a general murmur*).

REVUNOV (*not hearing*). Thank you, I have had some. (*With enthusiasm*) Everyone is ready and all eyes are fixed on the senior officer. . . . "Fore-topsail and mainsail braces to starboard, mizzen-braces to larboard, counter-braces to port," shouts the senior officer. Every order is carried out instantly. "Slacken fore-sheet and jib-stay . . . right to starboard"! (*gets up*). Then the ship rolls to the wind and the sails begin to flap. The senior officer shouts "To the braces! to the braces! look alive!" While he fixes his eyes on the topsail and when at last it begins to flap, that is, when the ship begins to turn, a terrific yell is heard: "Loose the mainsail-stays, let go the braces!" Then everything is flying and creaking —a regular tower of Babel; it's all done without a break. The ship is turned!

NASTASYA (*flaring up*). For all you are a general, you've no manners! You should be ashamed, at your age!

REVUNOV. Greengage? No, I have not had any. . . . Thank you.

NASTASYA (*aloud*). I say, you ought to be ashamed at your age! You are a general, but you have no manners!

NYUNIN (*in confusion*). Come, friends! . . . why make a fuss? . . . really.

REVUNOV. To begin with, I am not a general, but a captain of the second rank, which cor-

responds to a lieutenant-colonel of military rank.

NASTASYA. If you are not a general, what did you take the money for? We did not pay you money to be rude to us!

REVUNOV (*in perplexity*). What money?

NASTASYA. You know very well what money. You got the twenty-five roubles from Andrey Andreyevitch right enough . . . (*to* NYUNIN). It's too bad of you, Andryusha! I didn't ask you to engage a fellow like this.

NYUNIN. Oh, come. . . . Drop it! Why make a fuss?

REVUNOV. Engaged . . . Paid . . . What does it mean?

APLOMBOV. Allow me. . . . You've received twenty-five roubles from Andrey Andreyevitch, haven't you?

REVUNOV. Twenty-five roubles? (*Grasping the situation*) So that's how it is! Now I understand it! What a dirty trick! What a dirty trick!

APLOMBOV. Well, you had the money, hadn't you?

REVUNOV. I've had no money! Get away with you! (*gets up from the table*). What a dirty trick! What a mean trick! To insult an old man like this—a sailor—an officer who has seen honourable service! . . . If these were decent people I might challenge someone to a duel, but as it is, what can I do? (*distractedly*). Where is the door? Which way do I go? Waiter! show me out! Waiter! (*going*). What a mean trick! What a dirty trick! (*goes out*).

NASTASYA. Andryusha, where is that twenty-five roubles, then ?

NYUNIN. Oh, don't make a fuss about such a trifle ! As though it matters ! Here everyone is rejoicing, while you keep on about this silly business. (*Shouts*) To the health of the happy pair ! Band, a march ! (*The band plays a march.*) To the health of the happy pair !

MADAME ZMEYUKIN. I am stifling ! Give me atmosphere ! At your side I am suffocated !

YAT (*delighted*). Exquisite creature !

(*Hubbub.*)

THE BEST MAN (*trying to shout above the rest*). Ladies and gentlemen ! On this, so to say, festive occasion . . .

CURTAIN.

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